

Deseret Morning News, Friday, December 08, 2006

The hummable holidays

Just-released Christmas CDs are filled with old and new seasonal tunes

Deseret Morning News staffers are humming those familiar tunes and getting ready to curl up by a fire that is so delightful as the weather outside turns frightful ... or at least dips below freezing.

This time of year, it's all about the music. Goodness knows there are plenty of Christmas-themed CDs out there already — if you do a search for "Christmas" on Amazon.com's music page, there are no less than 23,376 titles to choose from.

So, in the spirit of giving (or selling), your friendly neighborhood music labels have added a bunch to that number this year, and we have reviewed as many as we could gather and listen to.

Here they are, in alphabetical order by the last name of the artist.

► **CHERIE CALL; "Gifts" (Andersonic)**

Local singer/songwriter Cherie Call is known for her substance as well as her style. In this collection she throws in a few traditional carols — "The First Noel," "I Wonder as I Wander," "Silent Night" — but the emphasis is on original songs. "Peace on Earth to Me" sets a nice tone; "Starting Again, Again" is a bittersweet look at life's struggles; guest artist Russ Dixon does a nice job on "The Man Behind the Scenes," a song from Joseph's point of view, balanced by "I Just Knew," which tells Mary's story. And "Gifts" and "Broken Hearts Like Mine" are reminders of what the season's all about. Call sings with emotion and feeling, as well as a clear sense of who she is and what she's doing. — **Carma Wadley**



Heather Tuttle, Deseret Morning News

► **BOOTSY COLLINS; "Christmas Is 4 Ever" (Shout Factory)**

Bassist and bandleader Bootsy Collins has put some funk in in the holidays. With "Christmas Is 4 Ever," the former Funkadelic member has taken such classics as "The Christmas Song," "Winter Wonderland" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and put them through the ringer to become "Chestnutz," "WinterFunkyLand" and "Boot-Off," respectively. He gets urban with "Silent Night" and the Wham song "This Christmas," which in Collins' hands becomes "Dis-Christmiss." — **Scott Iwasaki**

► **JIM COSGROVE, "Mr. Stinky Feet's Christmas" (Warner Bros.)**

Jim Cosgrove, aka "Mr. Stinky Feet," loves to make children smile. The Kansas City-based entertainer has traveled around the country doing just that, and this CD will add to

his happy repertoire with songs about Harold, the angel who can't sing, Phlegmwick the Elf, the trial of waiting for the holiday and other original numbers. There are some old standards, as well, and an international flavor with steel drums, Celtic instruments and Spanish lyrics on various numbers. — C.W.

► **MICHAEL DOWDLE; "Twenty-Five Beloved Carols of Christmas" (Sounds of Zion)**

Put Michael Dowdle in a room with an acoustic guitar and magic happens. In recent years Dowdle and his guitar have recorded a series of "Twenty-five Beloved ..." albums, using some of his favorite hymns and children's songs. Now he turns to Christmas with a collection of carols that, as he says, "deal with the sacred nature of this holiday." Included are "O Holy Night," "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," "Stars Were Gleaming," "The Coventry Carol" and "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." Although they are guitar solos, Dowdle varies the tempo, the key, the style and even provides additional background, so there is a lot of variety. His little blurb on each carol, telling of its history or its particular significance to him, also adds to the overall depth. — C.W.

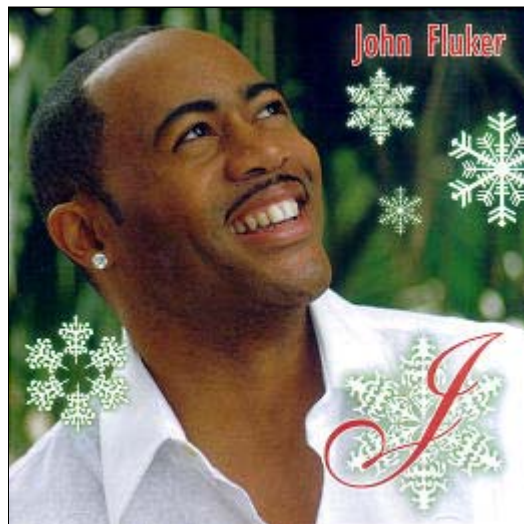


► **JOHN FLUKER; "J Is for Joy" (It's a Fluke Music).**

John Fluker is billed as a "potent brew of vocalist, musician, songwriter, producer, arranger and teacher." In addition to all that, he serves as Gladys Knight's music director and has toured internationally as a pianist/vocalist. So, when it comes to making a joyful noise, he knows what he's doing. This R&B/gospel collection is upbeat and uplifting. Fluker takes traditional carols and makes them his own. His original "Follow the Brightest Star" also has a nice message. Included are four instrumental versions of the carols, which add a nice mellowing finish. — C.W.

► **KIRBY HEYBOURNE; "Merry White Tree in the Night" (Inspia Media)**

Kirby Heybourne has made a name for himself on the movie screen and in recent years has also proved to be a talented musician. When he and producer Nathan DeVore decided to do this Christmas album, their only requirement was that it be nontraditional, and that's what you get, even though a few traditional carols are thrown into the mix. Heybourne gives them a mellow, ethereal tone that is fully in keeping with such original songs as "Wassail and Apple Pie," a tribute to his mother; "Snow Falls Down," a treatise on giving; and "Alleluia," which celebrates family. — C.W.



► **VINCE GUARALDI; "A Charlie Brown Christmas Original Sound Track" (Fantasy).**

Last year, the "Charlie Brown Christmas" television special celebrated its 40th anniversary. At that time, a new recording of the music featured contemporary interpretations. This year, a remixed, remastered version of the original soundtrack includes vocals sung by the Peanuts characters, as well

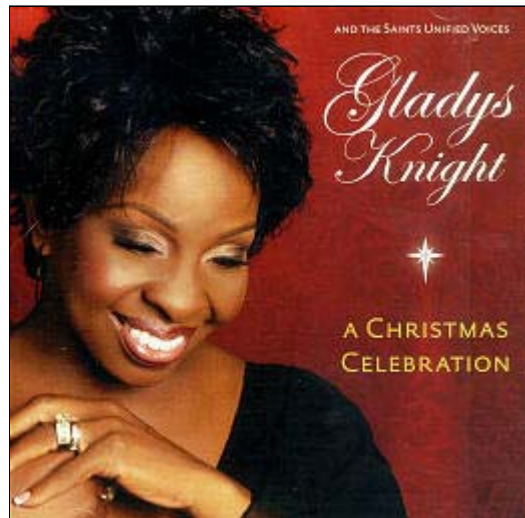
Guaraldi's jazzy instrumental music. A fun addition are some alternate takes, and liner notes tell how it was a fluke that Guaraldi was selected to do the music. Thumbnail sketches of key players in the TV production are also included. — **C.W.**

► **DARYL HALL AND JOHN OATES; "Home for Christmas" (U-Watch)**

Love them or not, Daryl Hall and John Oates are considered one of the best-selling musical duos in music history. The duo's soothing collaborations here on "The First Noel," "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" and "Jingle Bell Rock" complement the rhythm and blues flavor of the title track and "Children Go Where I Send Thee." — **S.I.**

► **GLADYS KNIGHT AND THE SAINTS UNIFIED VOICES; "A Christmas Celebration" (Many Roads Records).**

After winning a Grammy for best gospel-choir album last year, Gladys Knight and her Las Vegas-based Saints Unified Voices choir are back with this collection. From the meaningful introduction written and voiced by Knight, through a retelling of the Christmas story through song, to a selection of seasonal favorites, this CD offers a feel-good addition to the holiday. Knight has done all the vocal arrangements, and she sings the lead on a few selections, including "White Christmas" and with the SUV Quartet on "Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child." But other choir members also step to the fore. Kenya Jackson's lead on "Breath of Heaven" is especially nice, as are Heather Goedel's "I Wonder as I Wander," Rashida Jordan's "O, Come, All Ye Faithful" and Damon Andelin's "The Lord's Prayer." — **C.W.**



► **ERICH KUNZEL AND THE CINCINNATI POPS ORCHESTRA; "Christmastime Is Here" (Telarc).**

Erich Kunzel, known as the "Prince of Pop" in some circles, has released some 80 Cincinnati Pops projects over the years, reaching the heights on both classical and crossover charts. His works tend to be big, bold and innovative, and this one is a fine addition. With guest artists Ann Hampton Callaway, Tony DeSare, King's Singers, John Pizzarelli and Tierney Sutton, it stretches from easy listening to pop to jazz. Plus you'll hear nods to classical composers ranging from Johann Strauss to John Philip Sousa. — **C.W.**

► **THE LAWTUNES; "Merry Lexmas From The Lawtunes" (Lawrence Savell).**

If you have lawyers on your list — make that lawyers with a sense of humor — here's the perfect CD. Just reading the notes can get you laughing. For example, The Lawtunes explain their role: "From their humble beginnings in Brooklyn, New York, on an appropriately blustery day in December, 1957, The Lawtunes have long been the lone (and occasionally nearly harmonic) voice filling the void, vacuum and other euphemisms for "not a whole lot" that is the unique genre of original law-related holiday music." The

five-member group performs a number of songs with titles like "Another Billable Christmas," "A Footnote in My Stocking," "So if Your Client's Name Is Santa" and "The Twelve Days of Lexmas." Clever and fun. — **C.W.**

► **KATHY AND JANET LENNON; "Best Pals Celebrate Christmas" (KatJan Inc. Productions).**

This year, in honor of their 50th anniversary as performers, Kathy and Janet Lennon have introduced a set of dolls. As part of that project, they put together a CD of favorite children's songs, and have followed that with a CD of Christmas songs: lullabys ("A Cradle in Bethlehem," "Away in a Manger") and songs geared to youngsters ("Pure Imagination," "Christmas Children"), as well as carols and others ("The Star Carol," "My Favorite Things," "What Child Is This," "Some Children See Him") — all done with the trademark harmony that made the Lennon Sisters famous. — **C.W.**



► **THE MANHATTAN TRANSFER; "An Acapella Christmas" (Rhino)**

The pitch-perfect Manhattan Transfer offers such holiday standards as "Jingle Bells," "White Christmas," "Winter Wonderland," "Merry Christmas Baby," etc., each with that fabulous a cappella twist that only this quartet can offer. — **Chris Hicks**

► **JOHNNY MATHIS; "Gold: A 50th Anniversary Christmas Celebration" (Columbia)**

You've probably heard most of the songs on this CD — a lot. They are drawn from the many Christmas CDs Johnny Mathis has released over the years, which have become a part of the standard holiday repertoire: "The Christmas Song," "Silver Bells," "It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year," "Toyland" "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm." Read the titles, and you can hear his distinct voice in your head before you even push start. The one new song is a duet with Bette Midler on a medley of "Winter Wonderland" and "Let it Snow." Mathis has still got it but the old songs are by far the best. — **C.W.**



► **SARAH McLACHLAN; "Wintersong" (Arista)**

The thing listeners will notice most is the absence of Yoko Ono's shrilly vocals on "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)," the song that kicks off this album "Wintersong." McLachlan's arrangement is much easier to hear. McLachlan, who has recorded Christmas songs with the Barenaked Ladies, comes into her own with "What Child Is This? (Greensleeves)," "The First Noel/Mary Mary" and a loyal rendition of "Christmas Time Is Here" (with Diana Krall on piano). Joni Mitchell's "River," "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and "In the Bleak Mid-Winter" are practically flawless. McLachlan's trademark melancholy vocals and introspective arrangements bring the holidays into the soul. — **S.I.**

► **MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA AT TEMPLE SQUARE; "The Wonder of Christmas" (Mormon Tabernacle Choir)**

This is exactly how Christmas should sound — at least if you love the traditional carols and hymns. This compilation features performances from the choir's annual Christmas concerts, and it's a treat from start to finish. Guest artists include Renee Fleming, Angela Lansbury, Audra McDonald, Frederica Von Stade and Bryn Terfil. Each is outstanding, and the mix adds a lot of variety. The choir also contributes a number of selections, including very pretty Mack Wilberg arrangements of "Joy to the World," "Whence Is That Goodly Fragrance Flowing" and "What Shall We Give to the Babe in the Manger?" — **C.W.**

► **THE MUPPETS; "A Green And Red Christmas" (Walt Disney Records)**

All your favs are here: Kermit, Miss Piggy, Rowlf, Pepe, Fozzie, Statler & Waldorf, the Swedish Chef, Animal, Gonzo, Rizzo, Zoot and the Electric Mayhem Band. And they're having a lot of fun. You will, too, as you listen to "Zat You, Santa Claus?" "The Christmas Party Sing-Along," "The Man With the Bag," "Santa Baby" and "Run, Run, Rudolph." Kermit and Miss Piggy are cute as they debate whether red or green is the best Christmas color. — **C.W.**

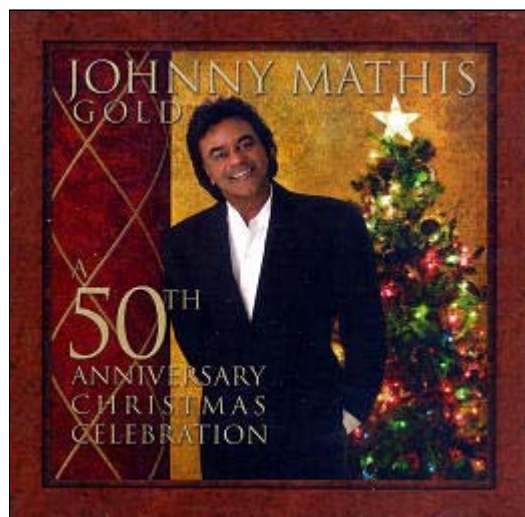


► **BRAD PAISLEY; "Christmas" (Arista).**

Brad Paisley is currently one of the hottest country singers around, so it's not surprising that his Christmas CD is filled with what has made him famous: unabashed country flavor, lots of steel guitar and twang, and a sometimes offbeat approach to life. There are traditional favorites — "I'll Be Home for Christmas" "Away in a Manger," "Silver Bells." There's a cover of Buck Owens' "Santa Looked a Lot Like Daddy," and Paisley gives "Winter Wonderland" a country spin. There's a fun duet with Paisley and his 13-year-old self singing one of the first songs he wrote, "Born on Christmas Day." — **C.W.**

► **RACHAEL RAY; "How Cool Is That Christmas" (Epic)**

Rachael Ray is noted for whipping up interesting concoctions on the Food Network. Now she's come up with an interesting musical concoction that features some of her funky all-time favorites. Elvis Presley, Billie Holiday, Bing Crosby and David Bowie are all here, as well as Buster Poindexter, Willie Nelson and Frank Sinatra. Doris Day's "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" is a reminder of how pretty her voice was as a singer before she took up acting. A young Aretha Franklin is also fun on "Winter Wonderland." Oh yes, there are recipes, too: Rachael's traditional Christmas Pasta and a "Fabulous 5-Minute Fudge Wreath." — **C.W.**



► **ANDRE RIEU; "Christmas Around the World" (Sony)**

Andre Rieu has become the darling of the public-television crowd, and this CD is billed "as seen on PBS." If you have seen that show, you will know what's going on here. But if you haven't, you might wonder why Rieu isn't the major player here as he probably is onstage. But most of the songs are

vocal numbers, performed by a variety of (unnamed in the liner notes) musicians to the accompaniment of Rieu and his orchestra. So you actually get very little in the way of violin music. (The instrumental "Star of Bethlehem" is the only exception.) More in the way of explanation would be helpful, but it is pleasant enough music. — **C.W.**

► **CARL TANNER; "Hear the Angel Voices" (TMG Records)**

Carl Tanner started planning this CD back when he was a teenager singing with his church choir. He had to go on to be a truck driver, a bounty hunter and finally an opera singer before his dream was realized, but he should be well-pleased with the results. Tanner, who has graced stages worldwide from Covent Gardens to La Scala, brings a rich and powerful tenor voice to the task of singing his favorite Christmas songs. — **C.W.**

► **JAMES TAYLOR; "At Christmas" (Columbia)**

With his distinctive sound and signature pacing, James Taylor has long been a fixture on the pop/folk music scene. He gives Christmas his unique spin on this collection of mostly "trads," as he calls them in the liner notes, songs such as "Winter Wonderland," "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town." Newer songs, "River" and "Who Comes This Night," are a perfect fit for his voice and style. — **C.W.**

► **TWISTED SISTER; "A Twisted Christmas" (Razor & Tie)**

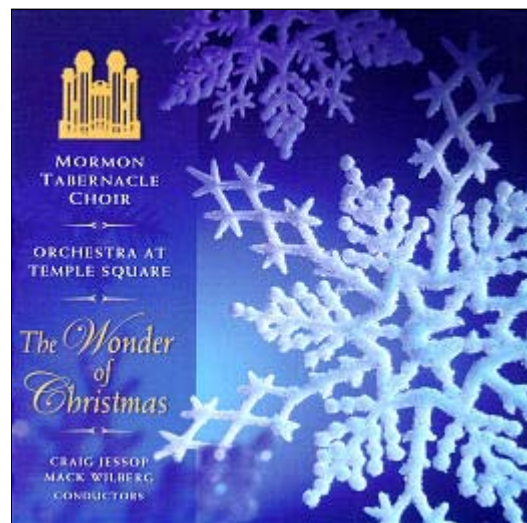
Those wild guys of '80s metal, led by singer Dee Snider, have reunited for the holidays in this raucous and irreverent holiday album that includes "White Christmas," "Silver Bells" and "I'll Be Home for Christmas" (with guest vocalist/guitarist Lita Ford). The take on "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" would be wrong if it weren't drop-dead funny, as well as "Heavy Metal Christmas (The 12 Days of Christmas)" — "Five Skull Earrings"? Listen to similar melodies of the band's biggest hit "We're Not Gonna Take It" and think "O Come All Ye Faithful." Scary, huh? — **S.I.**

► **THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH SINGERS; "Christmastide" (University of Utah)**

Under the direction of Brady R. Allred, the 46-voice University of Utah Singers have been garnering international recognition, and they bring that same excellence to this compilation that showcases their range, harmony and skill. "Infant Holy," "The Holly and the Ivy," "Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day" (two very different versions), "What Child Is This?" and "In the Bleak Midwinter" are here, as well as several newer songs — "Gabriel's Message," "Wishes and Candles," "This Christmastide." — **C.W.**

► **UTAH CHAMBER ARTISTS; "Joyous Day" (Clarion)**

Formed in 1991 by artistic director Barlow Bradford, the Utah Chamber Artists is made up of an approximately 40-voice choir and 40-piece orchestra that had received national and international recognition. This CD is filled mostly with traditional carols — "Still, Still, Still," "Pat-a-



Pan," "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" and "Carol of the Bells." Lesser-known songs, such as "Star Candles," "Suo Gan" and "Jesus, Jesus Rest Your Head," are a perfect addition. — **C.W.**

► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "Christmas Break: Relaxing Jazz for the Holidays" (Telarc)**

Once the Oscar Peterson Trio's electric piano version of "White Christmas" kicks off this album, listeners know they are in for a mellow, hot-cocoa-sipping night of holiday cheer. Mel Torme's "Christmastime Is Here" and Dave Brubeck's playful "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," George Shearing's "Donkey Carol" and "Away in a Manger," Ray Brown and his trio take on "The Christmas Song" — and Brubeck reworks with "Silent Night" and "Farewell Jingle Bells." — **S.I.**



► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "FM100: Welcome Home for the Holidays" (Bonneville International)**

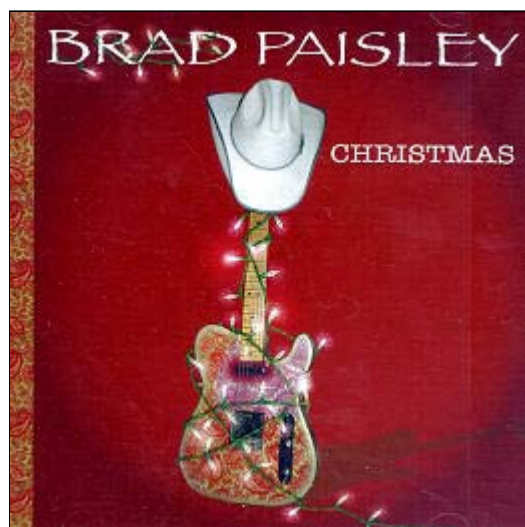
The FM100 radio station really gets into Christmas music. For the past six years, it has put together a compilation album showcasing local artists and local favorites, which also benefits the Road Home homeless shelter. This year's Vol. VI features mostly songs that have appeared on previous FM100 albums, including David Tolk's "Il Est Ne Le Divine Engant," Kurt Bestor's "Silent Night," the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's "Still, Still, Still" and Jon Schmidt's "I Saw Three Ships." New offerings include Jim Brickman's "Even Santa Fell in Love" and Chris Rice's "Let It Snow." — **C.W.**

► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "Kids Rap Radio: Holiday" (Music World)**

Matthew Knowles, better known as father of singer Beyonce and manager of her group Destiny's Child, recently started the "Kids Rap Radio" series, which records kid-friendly rap albums. This funky, eight-song album spotlights some groovy young rappers on "Christmas Rappin," "Christmas in Hollis" and "Ghetto Santa," just to name a few. Catchy, rockin' and soulful, and it can be played in the presence of the most mixed-up of mixed company.—**S.I.**

► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "The Nativity Story: Sacred Songs" (Curb)**

A package blurb says "Christian & Country artists offer Christmas favorites inspired by the film," which might make you think these are new songs written in connection with "The Nativity Story" movie. However, it's probably more correct to say this is a collection of songs that fit the tone and mood of the film, because most were written and recorded years earlier. Jaci Velasquez sets the tone with "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," Points of Grace adds a joyful "For Unto Us," and few people do "Breath of Heaven" better than Amy Grant, who co-wrote it. Jo Dee Messina, Kenny Rogers and Wynonna, Mark Schultz and LeAnn Rimes. — **C.W.**



► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "Putumayo Presents New Orleans Christmas" (Putumayo)**

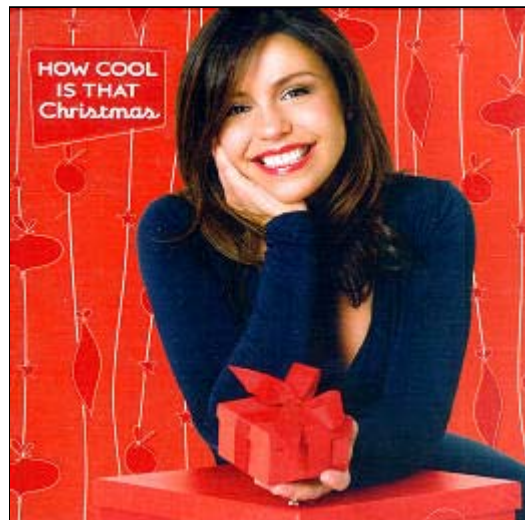
Put some swing into the season with "New Orleans Christmas." This 11-cut album is a soundtrack for the hippest Christmas party ever — Big Al Carson, Lars Edegran & His Santa Claus Revelers' Dixieland take on "Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town," Ingrid Lucia does "'Zat You Santa Claus?" and Ellis Marsalis' piano hop of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" gets the listener in the holiday spirit. — **S.I.**

► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "Simply Christmas: Home for the Holidays" (Sony)**

If you're looking for a softer, gentler place to celebrate the holidays, this collection of beautiful instrumental selections can take you there. A compilation of previously recorded material, it offers holiday perennials "Silent Night," "O Christmas Tree," "The Little Drummer Boy" and "O Come, All Ye Faithful" in addition to selections of classical works inspired by the season. — **C.W.**

► **VARIOUS ARTISTS; "A Very Special Charlie Brown Holiday Collection" (Concord Records)**

Created exclusively for the United States Postal Service (which maybe relates well to Charlie Brown at this time of year), this collection includes several selections off previous Charlie Brown albums as well as a few new offerings. The David Benoit Trio serves up a fun new rendition of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," and their "Jingle Bells" also has a lot of holiday sparkle. The Vince Guaraldi Trio performs several standards, including "Linus and Lucy," "The Christmas Song" and "Greensleeves." Vanessa Williams and Toni Braxton provide vocals on "Just Like Me" and "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year." — **C.W.**



► **ANDREAS VOLLENWEIDER; "Midnight Clear" (Kin Kou)**

New-age harpist Andreas Vollenweider has known singer/songwriter Carly Simon for more than 25 years, and they team up for the harpist's holiday album. Simon's trademark vocals are the highlights of such arrangements of "Midnight Clear," "Suspended Note," "Forgive" and "Hymn to the Secret Heart." The harpist goes at it with his studio musicians in instrumental works of "The Holly and the Ivy," "Over the Hills and Over the Vale," "The Coventry Carol," "The Wexford Carol" and "What Child Is This?" — **S.I.**

► **WYNONNA; "A Classic Christmas" (CURB)**

A bit of guitar here and there is the only clue that Wynonna makes her living as a country artist. Well, there's also her throaty voice, and you get a few more country leanings on her original "It's the Messiah," but for the most part this is a straight-forward collection of traditional Christmas songs. Included are "Winter Wonderland," "I'll Be Home for Christmas," "White Christmas" and "Silent Night." — **C.W.**

