



Tony DeSare

Yuletide Joy

BY FRANK JOHN HADLEY

One day, the music industry might reduce the scope of its annual late-fall parade of carols and commercial songs, but for now ... rejoice! Gifts of new and reissued albums of varying vibrancy are found amid the spate of stale releases bidding for notice this holiday season.

Australian fingerstyle guitarist **Tommy Emmanuel** gracefully spreads mellow holiday cheer on *Christmas Memories* (CGP Sounds 004; 39:38 ★★★★★). His immaculate technique is equally matched by his lyricism and warmth. But Emmanuel isn't the only excellent guitarist at his orderly Xmas party: Nashville pros Pat Bergeson and John Knowles know their way around the fretboard without grandstanding. Singer Annie Sellick displays confidence in her ability to entertain. Seldom do these players surrender to sentimentality. As songwriters, Emmanuel is responsible for the instrumental title track, and Sellick and Bergeson offer "Let's Make A Christmas Memory"—both pleasant jaunts. Elsewhere, Bergeson introduces blues harmonica to "Amazing Grace." Despite the moss sticking to "White Christmas" and a few other safe picks, this program flows nicely. Also in Santa's big bag: Emmanuel's album *All I Want For Christmas*, first delivered in 2011.

Ordering info: tommyemmanuel.com

Another world-class guitarist decking the halls with composure and with decorum is Laurence Juber, a former member of Paul McCartney's band Wings. **The Laurence Juber Trio's *Holidays & Hollynights*** (Hologram 1601; 33:36 ★★★★★) may be pulled down a bit by threadbare material, but Juber scores high marks for the clarion precision of his playing and for his tasteful arrangements. The acoustic bass and drums are as inconspicuous as the buttons on Santa's trousers. Bonus track "The

Christmas Song," featuring Juber alone with his Martin, ends the album on a note of quiet gaiety. This London native, who's now based in California, also offers exquisite solo guitar work on his 1997 album *Winter Guitar*.

Ordering info: hologramrecordings.com

From the opening bars of "I'll Be Home For Christmas" to the close of "Silent Night," singer and pianist **Tony DeSare's *Christmas Home*** (AJD Entertainment; 42:45 ★★★★★) conveys the joy this talented artist feels for the season. His rich, full voice walks a fine line between heartfelt drama and bathos, but, we're glad to say, it lands on the right side. DeSare is supported by a small orchestra that includes violins, viola, cello, harp, French horn and more. Think of him as a noble progenitor of Frank Sinatra, Johnny Mathis and other crooners. DeSare is a gifted pianist, getting just the right combination of delight and skillful touch on a solo version of "Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy." The two bonus tracks are hardly throwaways. The wickedly clever "18 Versions Of Jingle Bells" is a seven-minute concert performance in which DeSare mimics assorted singers and musical styles. His vocals on the captivating original tune "Christmas For You And Me" showcase an ease of delivery while communicating how deeply he cares about New York during the Christmas season.

Ordering info: tonydesare.com

Two volumes of **Joyful Jazz!—Christmas With Verve!** compile gems from label's extensive vault. **The Vocalists!** (Verve B0025707; 48:51 ★★★★★) begins with Mel Tormé hooking his prize ornament "The Christmas Song" onto the company tree. Also decorating, with stellar renditions of seasonal songs, are herald angels Louis Armstrong (with his zany "Zat You, Santa Claus?"), Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington, Peggy Lee, Shirley Horn and Betty Carter. Also in on the fun are modern upstarts



Patti Austin, Diane Schuur, Diana Krall and Norah Jones, the latter showing a lapse in taste by teaming up with Willie Nelson for a corny version of "Baby, It's Cold Outside." Trumpet soloists, here and there, fare well stringing the multicolored lights. But instances of extreme sentimentality are like lumps of coal.

Ordering info: UME.lnk.to/JoyfulJazzVol1

The second Verve collection, **The Instrumentals!** (Verve B0025708; 52:07 ★★★½), calls on John Coltrane, Oscar Peterson, Lionel Hampton, Jimmy Smith, Elaine Elias, the team of Roy Hargrove and Christian McBride and other luminaries—all recorded between 1957 and 1996—to promote messages of hope and peace. The highlight? It's hard to beat Trane's perpetually uplifting adaptation of the British folk song "Greensleeves" (aka "What Child Is This?"). Holiday jeer? Rotten chestnuts by smooth operators, such as saxophonist Nelson Rangell's "Let It Snow," evoking GRP sounds from the '90s. Rarity? The previously unreleased "I've Got My Love To Keep Me Warm" by the Oscar Peterson Quartet with Buddy Bregman's orchestra.

Ordering info: UME.lnk.to/JoyfulJazzVol2

Available again in the LP format for the first time since its 1965 debut, **Bobby Timmons' *Holiday Soul*** (Prestige 7414; 41:40 ★★★★★) finds the former Art Blakey and Cannonball Adderley sideman (who famously wrote "Dat Dere" and "Moanin'") officiating on piano with swinging authority. The Bud Powell-influenced musician energizes "Winter Wonderland" and seven more selections without seeming the least bit self-conscious about his soul-jazz and blues tendencies. The sound of sleigh bells adds to the yuletide atmosphere.

Ordering info: smarturl.it/Timmons.HolidaySoul

Also returning on vinyl is organist **Don Patterson's *Holiday Soul*** (Prestige 7415; 37:59 ★★★★★). In addition to sharing an album title, both Timmons