



LEFT of the DIAL

band width



Diana Krall
Christmas Songs
(Verve)

"It's Diana again," says Tony Romano. "This is the best thing she's done in about three albums." He should know. Romano, who toured the world as Krall's sound man before taking a hiatus back home here in Buffalo, says Krall was previously asked to release a Christmas album but resisted for some time. Some of the material had been in the can for years. Why the timing is now right, we don't know, as Krall often resists interviews. The new tracks and the bulk of the dozen selections feature the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, which makes *Christmas Songs* Krall's first big band recording. "She's got beautiful charts," says Tony, "and her big band stuff is first rate. Give a listen. Check out the orchestration, how beautiful it is." Krall's singing here subtly shows off her jazz chops. Crossover critiques aside, Krall's technique and expression are informed by jazz and although *Christmas Songs* features "accessible" jazz vocals, they're free of what Romano considers the influence of husband Elvis Costello (whose live recording with the Metropole Orkest will be released in February). *Christmas Songs* weighs in at only 45 minutes, but it's a fine 45 minutes featuring a variety of styles, from a sweet "I'll Be Home for Christmas" to a sassy "Santa Clause is Coming to Town" to a swinging "Jingle Bells." And since *A Charlie Brown Christmas* with the Vince Guaraldi Trio was only a little over 40 minutes (and both feature "Christmas Time is Here"), you can enjoy both over a long holiday dinner and dessert. Take it from Tony. Give a listen.

—bob davis



Brian Wilson
What I Really Want for Christmas
(Arista)

2005 was a pretty good year for legendary Beach Boy leader Brian Wilson. His lost 1960s opus, *Smile*, perhaps the most famously unreleased album in rock history, finally saw the light of day and was performed live on tour, no less. With his youthful new backing band, Wilson managed to successfully recreate—and significantly re-imagine—his infamous opus to America's culture and music. A cynic might look upon this achievement as a way to shadow the fact that Wilson's original material of late is a pale imitation of his former work. Last year, ol' Bri released *Gettin' In Over My Head*, the most unintentionally astute album title since Eric Clapton (whose guested on the recording) put out *Me and Mr. Johnson* (an easy title to pick on considering the fact that Slow Hand's solo career has been fairly self-gratuitous and masturbatory for the last 20 years or so). At this point, Wilson's musical career is on auto-pilot and guided by a group of well-intentioned if overly forceful family members, fans and bandmates. Wilson is no longer the musical string-puller but rather the puppet who falls to the floor when left unaided. Which brings us to his new holiday offering, *What I Really Want for Christmas*. A collection of holiday standards and a few new originals, the disc provides fans with Wilson's first yuletide recording since The Beach Boys released its classic *Christmas Album* over 40 years ago (although a scrapped album from the late-1970s was finally issued on the *Ultimate Christmas* CD a few years back). Furthering the state of hyper-reality currently surrounding Wilson's career is the re-recording of such Beach Boys material as "Man With All the Toys" and "Little Saint Nick" heard here. The performances are pretty much faithful reworkings of the original material which, for my money, lands them full into the "Why bother?" category. Of the new material, Wilson's collaboration with famed songwriter Jimmy Webb, "Christmasey," provides the best glimpse of the old magic, musically speaking. Recalling the wall-of-sound production, off-kilter rhythms and layered harmonies of his best work, "Christmasey" proves that there may be a little light left in the old boy yet (even if its lyrics are impossibly laughable: "It's almost time to light up the candles/The church bells chime/It's a song of Handel's." Wow, that's brutal!). Many of the traditional holiday songs heard here (a jazzy take on "Deck The Halls," for instance) seem unnecessary at best and irritating at worst. Yet, by the album's end, Wilson and company manage to issue a rather moving rendition of "Joy to the World" that nearly saves the day. As far as holiday albums go, *What I Really Want for Christmas* is a mixed bag that is recommended for hardcore Wilson-philes only.

—mark norris



Marah
A Christmas Kind of Town
(Yep Roc Records)

Swaggering, rock and roll-hearted Philadelphia-native brothers Serge and Dave Bielanko (along with their friends who comprise the collective The Christmas Time Players for this outing) singing about Santa? Yep, surprisingly Marah has released the most fun and charming holiday-themed release of the season. Recorded in a sweltering apartment in the hottest stretch of July 2005, you can still somehow almost hear snowflakes falling on city streets. The brothers mix up their take on traditional favorites (like Dave's straight-ahead merriment with "Holly Jolly Christmas" and his tender take on "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas" as well as Serge's rough-hewn pining on "Silver Bells") with original compositions like the playful "Handsome Santa" and the destined-for-classic-carol status "New York Is A Christmas Kind Of Town." For a band known for its uniquely garage-spirited hybrid of folk, punk and rock, Marah's recording and arrangements on *Christmas Kind Of Town* are surprisingly polished, showing off immaculate harmonies and more than a few Phil Spector-inspired moments. Flip the coin for a few raucous polkas, some boozey-eyed sketches and bumpers and, all in all, Marah have injected a lot of fun and life into the moldy Christmas album formula while not entirely diverging from the classic path. The final question: Could a Rankin/Bass special be far behind for Marah? I can already see the claymation Bielankos frolicking and dancing in the snow with The Heat Miser and Bumble.

—donny kutzbach

Group Name: 50 Amp Fuse

When/Where playing this week?

Saturday (Dec. 17) at 11pm at the Tudor Lounge.

Band Members / Instruments played...

Richie- bass/physics and earth science

Brian- guitar/global studies 9

Jeremy- guitar/health & P.E.

Brennan- drums/Spanish 2.

When did the band form?

Last summer outside of the Mohawk Place. It was more of a dare than anything else. Eventually, Brian and I got together to write a few songs; two drummers and three guitarists later, we had a band.



You might like our music if you like....

The Cars, Jellyfish, Weezer, Asia, pop music in general.

List of Recorded Releases

The only official recording is *Chameleonwest's Music is Art* 2005 CD but, much like The Dead, there is a roving band of hippies who record each of our live shows...but copies are damn hard to find.

Upcoming events:

Our CD, *Dirty Sock Girl*, is slated for release just after New Year's, but we're already working on the follow-up.

Best show the band ever played...

Best show we ever played was in November at Nietzsche's. It was Brennan's first gig and he was great. He averaged only one mistake a song...that's good for him.

Worst show the band ever played...

Anything outdoors tends to be bad for us, especially hot summer days. We're all very delicate, you know, and the sun does burn our fair skins ever so much.

Anything else you would like our readers to know about the band?

Come see us play...we're worth every cent!

Contact information:

fiftyampfuse@hotmail.com