

## Holiday Goodies from the “Brown Elvis” and Others

Written by John James

Tuesday, 05 December 2000 18:00

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Holiday high jinks! Animal instincts! Christmas camaraderie and much egg-noggery! Take musical arms my friends, and toss those lame superstar Christmas albums to the dustbin! Come with me, and let's dip into Santa's sack a little early this year and get the party started right! I've always thought Christmas was a lot like Elvis, all about love and all about showbiz. For that gold-lamé, high-collar, and breakaway-jumpsuit kinda Christmas, I recommend the new King, El Vez (the “Brown Elvis”) and his new Noelvezsi collection on the U.K. Poptones label. If you've ever seen one of his over-the-top stage shows, you know how he and his barrio gentry rock 'n' roll Vegas style through a nonstop cavalcade of south-of-the-border song parodies, costume changes, and darn-near gospel revival. This new CD captures the brilliance of El Vez's ability to transform classic gringo pop mantras into his signature alternative-universe Aztec Elvis persona – a delightful culture clash. Say it loud! He's brown and he's proud! The opening track, and first single, is his take on “Feliz Navidad,” but this isn't your daddy's version. Built upon the “Fodderstompf”-era bass line from Public Image Limited's 1978 “Public Image” and Knack power-pop chords from “Let Me Out,” El Vez shows off his ability to smash together a few unforgettable New Wave riffs and the lyrics of “Feliz Navidad” into his own half-breed of roasted chestnuts and hot sauce! A must-hear delight! Other gems include “I'm Dreaming of a Brown Christmas” and the Rolling Stones' “Dead Flowers”-esque “Oranges For Christmas.” ... Another import-only treasure is served by the Jeepster label in conjunction with London's X-FM radio station: the It's A Cool, Cool Christmas various-artist compilation featuring The Flaming Lips' take on “White Christmas” and the Dandy Warhols' spin on “The Little Drummer Boy.” Other contributors to this eclectic mix include Grandaddy, Teenage Fanclub, the eels, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, Belle & Sebastian, and Kenickie's Lauren Laverne. ... The independent Parasol Records label from Urbana, Illinois, serves up its first full-length holiday album of pure pop sweetness with Christmas Singles, taken from the shimmering opening track by Erik Voeks. Other friends and labelmates who have joined hands for this project include Elizabeth Elmore's acoustic-guitar take on “I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas,” Shalini's yuletide surf instrumental of Kim Fowley's “Nutrocker,” and the Signalmen's syrupy “Holiday Wine.” Highly recommended. ... Sarah McLachlan and the Barenaked Ladies stretch their vocal chops on a spirited version of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” from Nettwerk Records' new Christmas Songs compilation. Other tracks include Matthew Ryan's spooky cover of “The Little Drummer Boy,” Tara

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MacLean’s stroll through “Winter Wonderland,” and songs by Dido, Delerium, Mediaeval Babes, and more. ... Rhino Records is always sure to issue a handful of charming holiday CDs each year. For the happy electronica fan, may I direct you to plug in Mark Mothersbaugh’s Joyeux Mutato, the cheerful new CD collection of traditional holiday standards gone space-age wacky from the founding DEVO headmaster. A bit more down to earth, yet sent from the heavens, is Rhino’s Christmas Belles collection produced in conjunction with the Lifetime cable TV channel. The 14-track set highlights the fabulous voices of Lena Horne, Rosemary Clooney, June Christy, Sarah Vaughan, Eartha Kitt, Julie London, and other grand ladies of song as they lay down holiday favorites that put the lush in luscious. ... Bob Rivers and his band of pranksters have a new parody CD this season, Chipmunks Roasting On An Open Fire on the Atlantic label. His signature “twisted” take on classic rock songs transformed into silly yuletide mirth can be found this year in “Santa Claus Is Foolin’ Around” à la Bruce Springsteen, “Christmas Money (That’s What I Want)” à la John Lennon, and “Goin’ Up To Bethlehem” à la CCR. Ouch! ... Not smarmy enough for the elves? How about Sleighed: The Other Side of Christmas compilation from Hip-O Records? This one features Beck’s “Little Drum Machine Boy,” Sonic Youth’s “Santa Doesn’t Cop Out on Dope,” the Little Stinkers’ “I Farted On Santa’s Lap,” and the raunchy Red Peters’ “You Ain’t Getting S\*\*\* for Christmas.” How’s that for today’s teen holiday spirit? Other contributors include Goldfinger, Local H, Plankeye, Spinal Tap, and Bob & Doug McKenzie’s classic beer-soaked “Twelve Days of Christmas.”

### Television Alert:

The Tonight Show with Jay Leno welcomes Sting on Monday; The Late Show with David Letterman hosts the Wallflowers on Monday; Late Night with Conan O’Brien has Jimmy Page & the Black Crowes on Friday overnight, and Flogging Molly on Tuesday overnight; Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher gets chatty with members of Third Eye Blind on Monday overnight; The Late Late Show With Craig Kilborn gives it up for Billy Bragg this evening overnight; and Saturday Night Live’s musical guest this weekend is U2.

### New Releases Coming Tuesday, December 12:

and like the winds, young grasshopper, are subject to change. ...

Cypress Hill – Live at the Fillmore (Columbia) recorded in San Francisco in August

Dracula 2000 – original motion picture soundtrack (DV8/Columbia) music from Monster Magnet, Slayer, System of a Down, and Powerman 5000

Eminem – E (Interscope) seven-video collection on DVD or VHS

Etta James – Matriarch Of the Blues (RCA) featuring a cover of the Rolling Stones’ “Miss You”

Kittie – Paperdoll (Artemis) EP of live and studio tracks

Lil’ Wayne – Lights Out (Cash Money/Universal)

Pushover – Logic & Loss (Asian Man)

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Silverchair – The Best Of: Volume One (Epic) 23-track collection of singles and rare B sides, including their take on Black Flag’s “Wasted” and “Fix Me”

SPM – Time Is Money (Dope House/Universal) fourth album from the Texas hip-hopper

Tool – Salival (Volcano) DVD or VHS box-set collection of the band’s infamously bizarre videos and an eight-track CD of previously unreleased live and studio material, including the group’s take on Led Zeppelin’s “No Quarter”

Xzibit – Restless (Loud) with guests Nate Dogg, DJ Quik, KRS One, Eminem, Dr. Dre, and more

Neil Young – Landing On Water and Life (Geffen) CD re-issues of this pair of long out-of-print late 1980s’ albums

Neil Young – Road Rock Volume One (Reprise) CD or DVD live album features an 18-minute version of “Cowgirl In the Sand,” the previously unreleased “Fool for Your Love,” and a cover of Bob Dylan’s “All Across the Watchtower” with Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders