

'OY' OFFERS SOMETHING FOR ALL



The Klezmonauts
"Oy to the World!: A Klezmer Christmas"
Satire Records
Grade: B

So, you're sitting around with friends this holiday season, and you get the urge to play some Christmas music.

Unfortunately for your urge, some of your friends are Jewish, some don't believe in Jesus, and some just think Christmas music is boring, cliched and has nothing new to offer.

Well, an album has come along that can satisfy everyone in the room: It's "Oy to the World!" by the Klezmonauts.

The Klezmonauts specialize in klezmer music, which is a genre that combines traditional Jewish music and jazz. The klezmer scene is pretty evenly divided between Jewish and

black musicians, and the music usually jumps from style to style with ease.

The Klezmonauts are equally adept at slipping from one genre to another, and they have set their sights on traditional Christmas music. What would make a bunch of Jewish men and women perform Christmas songs? The liner notes explain:

"The clash of seemingly incongruous forces can produce surprising and, sometimes, brilliant results. In fact, were it not for the random collision of some wholly unrelated gases a few billion years ago, where would any of us be now?"

"With this in mind, the Klezmonauts - Paul Libman's band of intrepid musical explorers - go forth and discover that mysterious place where Christmas music, with its warm sentimentality, meets Klezmer music, and its dark-tinged festivity. ..."

The songs on "Oy" are largely instrumental, taking the Jesus out and leaving the melody in. The songs end up sounding like traditional Jewish tunes, bar mitzvah music and jazz standards instead of the Yuletide songs they are.

There's also a little rock 'n' roll, classical and film score music thrown into the mix, too.

"Little Drummer Boy" is played very traditionally until the drum solo kicks in, turning the almost somber carol into the Surfari's "Wipe Out" for a few bars. Then, the guitars break

into some Dick Dale-like surf tones before reverting back to the original melody.

The Klezmonauts roast some classic rock chestnuts over an open fire when they play a few bars from "Smoke on the Water" in the middle of "Good King Wenceslas."

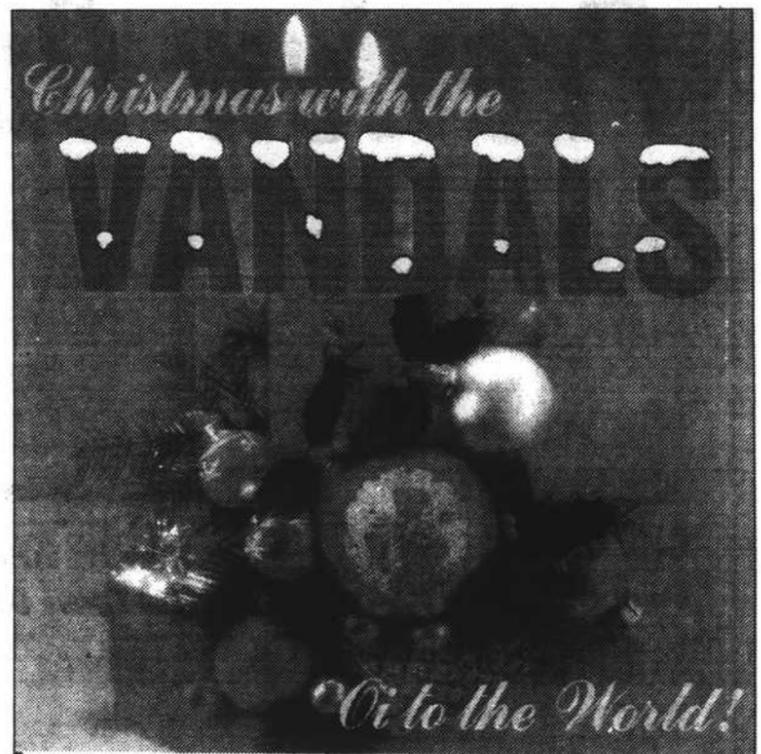
The best Christmas genre-mangling occurs on "God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman," when the band plays the melody spaghetti-western style, complete with Spanish guitars, accordion and a few snatches from Ennio Morricone's score for "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." Blue Note jazz musician Fareed Haque guests on guitar.

Two tracks feature vocals. "Santa Gey Gezunderheit" is a polka-flavored waltz about a Jewish man who's glad he doesn't have Santa Claus' job. "Jingle Bells" is given the full klezmer treatment, with all the vocals sung in Yiddish.

The album is humorous, but the level of musicianship keeps "Oy to the World" novelty-free. The two most accomplished tracks, "Carol of the Bells" and "Away in a Manger," are beautiful hybrids of classical and jazz, with a weeping violin carrying the melody.

"Oy to the World" is a diverse, accomplished and fun album for Jews, Christians and anyone who likes good music.

- Josh Krauter



VANDALS' HOLIDAY A TASTELESS TREAT

The Vandals
"Christmas with the Vandals - Oi to the World!"
Kung Fu Records
Grade: B

Merry Christmas, here's a gun. If this sounds like the type of Yuletide cheer you'd like to spread this holiday, maybe you should spend Christmas with the Vandals.

The notorious punk band responsible for albums such as "Live Fast Diarrhea" and "Hitler Bad, Vandals Good" released a Christmas album in 1996. The album, "Oi to the World," explores the more dysfunctional side of everybody's favorite holiday.

Despite being 3 years old, many of the themes on the album still have a place under the tree for a country heading toward total annihilation in the year 2000. Songs such as "Grandpa's Last Xmas" and "My First Xmas As a Woman" push the level of tastelessness to the edge. Then, songs such as "Christmas Time for my Penis" and "Hang Myself From the Tree" kick it right into the abyss of disgusting stupidity.

Aside from a revved up cover of "Here I Am Lord," the album features 12 Vandals originals about Christmas and its many detractions. "Thanx For Nothing" explores those awkward moments when you buy someone a gift, and they don't get you squat. Lines such as "You shouldn't have, oh - you didn't" and "So I'm a sap, under the Christmas tree, trying to find the gifts you got for me, but there was nothing there" illustrate a pain we've all felt. Or maybe it's just me.

"Nothing's Going to Ruin My Holiday" takes the Clark W. Griswald approach to song writing and starts out with an enthusiastic yell, "This is going to be the best Christmas ever!" but ends with "And if you try to ruin my holiday, I'll punch you in your fat, disgusting, turkey-eating face. Understand me?" Sadly, I think many Americans do.

It's funny, in a sick, 'Ha, ha, I wish I'd never heard that' type of way. ... It just makes you want to be a good person."

Musically, the album is typical Vandals. For the most part, songs are fast with tempo changes into slow, sing-songy parts with little distortion. Of course, layered into the power chords and Gatling gun style of Josh Freese's drumming are sounds of jingle bells, violins and other typically Christmas sounds, such as a crying baby Jesus. How cute.

In terms of providing that warm snuggling by the fireplace and drinking eggnog feel, "Oi to the World" probably isn't the right choice. It's funny, in a sick, "Ha, ha, I wish I'd never heard that" type of way, and musically it's got some catchy numbers, but more than anything, it just makes you want to be a good person.

Ultimately, "Oi to the World" is worth buying if you're a Vandals fan. If you're not a Vandals fan, find a Vandals fan and listen to their copy.

The low-brow sophomoric humor that runs rampant on "Oi to the World" is, in essence, like taking a break from the family Christmas dinner to go potty in your high school boys locker room and hearing O'Doyle tell a few jokes. It's a good time, but it makes the turkey taste so much better when you get back to the warm confines of your family.

- Jason Hardy

CROSBY A CHRISTMAS MAINSTAY

Bing Crosby
"The Very Best Of Bing Crosby Christmas"
MCA/Decca Records
Grade: A

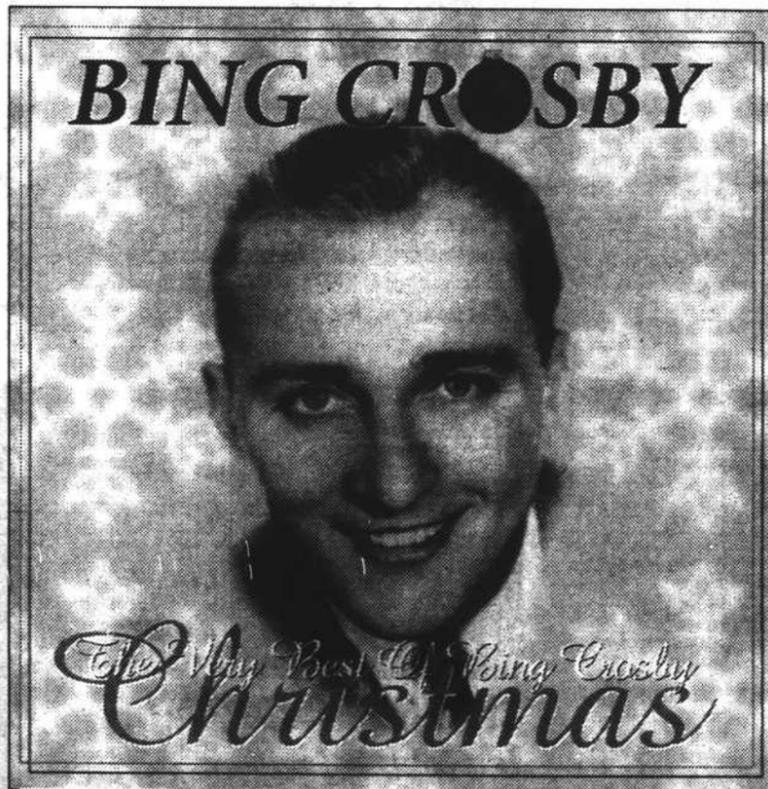
When it comes to Christmas music, one name almost always comes to mind.

No, it's not the Chipmunks, Dork. I'm talking about the timeless sounds of Bing Crosby - a man whose voice was so smooth and warm, it continues to set the tone for Christmas year after year.

Recently, MCA and Decca records released yet another Bing Crosby Christmas album, this one titled "The Very Best of Bing Crosby Christmas." With 18 quality recordings of Crosby's many versions of Christmas classics, the name is quite fitting.

Despite having recorded his first Christmas carols in 1935, Crosby's voice carries a class and tradition that modern artists such as Mariah Carey and 98° simply can't capture. With Crosby's voice, you can almost hear the chestnuts roasting on an open fire. With Mariah Carey and 98°, you just hear the seeping saline of a faulty boob job or the doofus mumbling of a frat boy praying for a Porsche this year.

That's just not Christmas. Not only does "The Very Best Of Bing Crosby Christmas" have a large number of traditional carols, including "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas," "Adeste Fideles," "Silent Night" and "Silver Bells," it includes some of Crosby's more lively and contemporary songs as well. Tunes such as "Rudolph the Red-Nosed



Reindeer" and "Santa Claus is Coming To Town" blend seamlessly with Crosby's more somber tones.

While the selection of any Christmas compilation is important, the quality of the actual recordings should not be overlooked. This collection excels in that area by including a new transfer to CD of Crosby's rendition of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" from the 1942 film "Holiday Inn."

The original recording of "White Christmas" has been damaged by excessive wear to the point that trans-

ferring it onto CD format is impossible. However, a better quality commercial pressing became available and was used on "The Very Best of Bing Crosby Christmas."

Throughout his career, Crosby was responsible for well over 40 different Christmas recordings, and "The Very Best Of Bing Crosby Christmas" is a great package of his best work.

It comes as yet another heartfelt gift from a man who already gave Christmas so much.

- Jason Hardy