

## Jewel brings fragile sound to holidays



BY ANDREW SHAW

Jewel's thin soprano cuts through Christmas tunes like a warm knife through meringue on "Joy: A Holiday Collection."

She does a decent job with the over-the-top arrangements she has to work with, but the album as a whole is merely passable.

Jewel's country-rock take on "Winter Wonderland" is catchy, but a children's choir always seems to ruin the best arrangements of Christmas carols. A swinging slide guitar paired with Jewel's distinctive yodeling creates an unusual solo that is easy on the ears.

"Face of Love" features touching lyrics which capture the meaning of Christmas. And the arrangement is generally well executed, a rarity on "Joy."

The greatest tracks on the album, like this Jewel original, have sparse and simple instrumentation, rich harmonies and a sense of control, but it is easy to overstep these bounds.

One of Jewel's best songs is "Hands," an inspirational tune urging listeners to enjoy what they have and not to dwell on what they don't. It's a great message, but becomes trite when flooded with a full choir, bells, orchestra and other effects Arif Mardin, the album's producer, apparently thinks need to be included on a song for it to count as a Christmas song.

Jewel is an exceptional artist who should produce her own Christmas album and stop listening to what others say. She has traditionally been light-handed and careful with how she approaches her music.

If "Joy" were approached with that kind of fragility, every song would be a work of folk-pop art. The way it is, the album is too overpowering to be effective.

## Christmas classics stand test of time

BY ANDREW SHAW

No one does Christmas like Bing Crosby, and no one ever will. His name is synonymous with Christmas carols.

The late lazy-voiced singer is an evergreen performer, and his delicate treatment of Christmas favorites will never grow old.

On "The Very Best of Bing Crosby Christmas," 18 of his greatest arrangements are compiled into one listener-friendly collection.

With the album's opening track, "It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas," you're sent into a long-lost wonderland where Christmas was a more innocent holiday. Lyrics referring to "a pair of Hop-A-Long boots and a pistol that shoots" just don't exist anymore.

A touching arrangement of "Silent Night" is perfectly executed. A simple, harmonious string orchestra backs Crosby's effortless crooning.

Beyond that, the song becomes something truly sacred within the lips of this master. He truly understood

the spirit of Christmas and the sanctity of the popular hymn, treating it with the soulful skill the tune deserves.

Yet Crosby can kick up his heels and have a rollicking good time on secular romps like "Jingle Bells." Partnering with the Andrews Sisters, Crosby perfects yet another classic.

Backed by a joyful jazz band of tinny trumpets and featuring a smoothly rocking clarinet solo, "Jingle Bells" will never again have the same feel as when Crosby sings it.

What Crosby Christmas collection would be complete without "White Christmas?" Crosby first recorded the Irving Berlin standard in 1942, opening the door for any artist to record their version of a Christmas album.

Three decades of beautiful recordings are collected on "The Very Best of Bing Crosby Christmas," creating an instant classic.



Jerry Morgan/DN

## A corporate Christmas leaves disappointment

BY ANDREW SHAW

Christmas corporate-style is in full swing on "My Kind of Christmas," Christina Aguilera's second full album released in 2000.

After giving her big hits a Spanish flare on "Mi Reflejo" this summer, Aguilera twists Christmas into an R&B-bubble gum popfest.

Featuring three original Christmas-inspired tunes and eight revamped standards, "My Kind of Christmas" may appeal to a younger audience that doesn't understand the true meaning of Christmas.

The most frightening track is "This Year," which uses the time of winter merriment to sing another



unabashedly sexual song with lyrics like "You'll be my April Fool/my Mardi Gras/the music on my tongue when I sing fa la la."

Although the original tracks and dance reversions of standards like Mel Torme's "The Christmas Song" fall

short of appealing, Aguilera's version of "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" proves the corporate-infused princess has real talent.

This track features a soft string background and allows Aguilera to play with the tune as she wishes. Her voice dips and soars throughout the piece, showing off her expertise, but she still hasn't mastered control.

It's impressive to hear her climb and drop through scales and inflections, but someone needs to tell her that her voice is powerful enough to make a real impact without all the flare.

"O Holy Night," one of the all-time greatest religious Christmas songs, is interpret-

ed with beauty and skill until two minutes into the song when the entire feel is ruined by the cheesy insertion of the Lord's Prayer.

After Aguilera recites this powerful prayer - as if she doesn't understand what she's saying - the song devolves into one of the worst Gospel jams ever performed. Aguilera has ruined "O Holy Night."

"My Kind of Christmas" shows Aguilera's potential at becoming an important pop artist, but also showcases her naiveté and immaturity. In the future, Aguilera may produce an appropriately touching Christmas album, but "My Kind of Christmas" has a long way to go.