

# USA WEEKEND

DECEMBER 21-23, 2012 • [usaweekend.com](http://usaweekend.com)



Our gift to you:  
Download  
'Silent Night'  
sung by  
country trio  
Lady Antebellum.

## A JOYFUL NOISE

Why we love  
Christmas Music

CHEESY BREAKFAST BAKE • STRESSED? 3 FIXES • YEAR-END TAX SAVINGS

IN THIS  
ISSUE

# Songs from the heart

BY CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN

**Christmas stars:**  
Charles Kelley, left,  
Hillary Scott and  
Dave Haywood are  
country superstars  
Lady Antebellum.

**FREE SONG:**  
Download **Silent Night**  
from Lady Antebellum's  
new holiday album as  
our gift to 1,000 readers.  
Visit [usaweekend.com](http://usaweekend.com).

From **Silent Night**  
to **Santa Baby**,  
ever-present  
Christmas music  
inspires and  
entertains. Here's  
a look at how  
it strikes a chord.

**C**HRISTMAS MUSIC works an invisible magic that you can't escape and you can't deny. Songs and hymns, sacred and secular, resonate within us. For joyful Christians, a savior is born. For everyone, warmth and light and beauty abound. We are embraced by love — and sometimes by longing. We're stirred by childhood memories.

That's why public singalongs to Handel's inspiring *Messiah* sell out concert halls nationwide and orchestras offer Arcangelo Corelli's exquisite *Christmas Concerto*. That's why singers in every genre cover the Christmas standards, and songwriters try to write new classics. All hope to create the soundtrack for many Decembers to come.

New 2012 Christmas albums are frosted with stars. A sampling includes Rod Stewart, Cee Lo Green and Blake Shelton. Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta team up once more. A *Very Special Christmas*, the series that raised millions for charity, marks a milestone with two CD collections: *A Very Special Christmas, Bringing Peace on Earth* and *A Very Special Christmas 25th Anniversary, Bringing Joy to the World*. And Scotty McCreery, Amer-

*USA TODAY* religion writer Cathy Lynn Grossman waits in vain for a Rolling Stones Christmas album. This story includes reporting from *USA TODAY* music correspondent Brian Mansfield, who has collected 1,000 Christmas CDs.

ican Idol's Season 10 winner, launches the Christmas album he has wanted to do since he began singing. What else would you expect from someone who grew up in a house bedecked each year with more than a dozen Christmas trees, a guy who has performed *O Holy Night* since fourth grade?

### Holiday ties bind Lady Antebellum

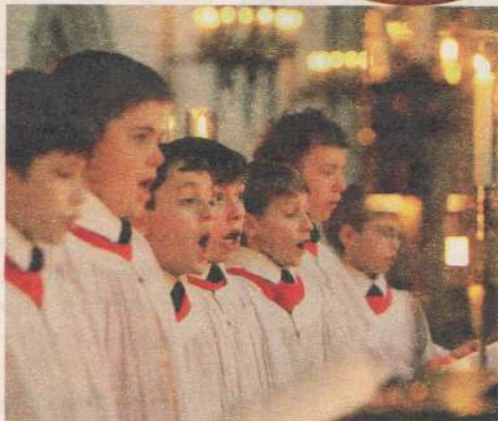
Grammy-decorated country trio Lady Antebellum — Hillary Scott, Charles Kelley and Dave Haywood — planned their first Christmas album by recalling how this holiday ties each of them to faith, family and fun.

A favorite lyric for Scott is in the title song, *On This Winter's Night*, composed by the trio with songwriter Tom Douglas: "Strangers look like neighbors with every smile that you meet." The song speaks of blessings, embraces, gifts — and the gift of a savior. The refrain echoes, "We will remember."

Kelley takes pleasure in one cut he chose for the album. His story begins Christmas Eve 2008 as he rushed back to Nashville from a performance in New York. He was packing big plans but bad weather grounded his flight in Atlanta. So Kelley rented a car, drove four hours and made it to his girlfriend's family dinner before dessert. Christmas morning, as planned, he proposed to his now-wife, Cassie. When the group created this album, Kelley locked in *I'll Be Home for Christmas*.

Haywood considers *Silent Night* an essential, the song he recalls concluding every

HO, HO, HO AND HOLY: Christmastime music easily embraces both a caroling tomato (Bob, from the Veggie Tales children's video series) and the choir at King's College, Cambridge University, singing *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*.



Christmas Eve service at his church. Small wonder, says Edwin Willmington, affiliate professor of worship, theology and the arts at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.: *Silent Night* offers "a complete storytelling of Christmas." And telling the gospel story was the task of church music, written to signal the cycles of the Christian year.

Classic Christmas hymns are 150 to 200 years old. The canon be-

came more standardized as carols found their way into hymnals. Willmington tells how the theologically rich *O Little Town of Bethlehem* was written by a pastor who spun his 1865 visit to the town of Christ's birth into a song for children. In this new millennium, millions still sing of how "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

### Americans like a musical mix

Most Americans (70%) say they enjoy Christmas music, but one in four (28%) find it annoying or overdone, reports a November survey of 1,191 adults by LifeWay Research, a Christian research agency in Nashville.

Not surprisingly, the biggest fans are churchgoers. Still, LifeWay found that most (59%) of those who never go to services still groove to the sounds of the season. And the majority, including the most devout, prefer a mix of secular and religious songs.

Contemporary music leans secular. But people still write songs with an eternal Christian message, Willmington says. He cites *Mary, Did You Know?* — a 1991 song asking whether Mary realized her child would be born to save the world. When religious songs waft through malls, playing second fiddle to the *ka-ching* of cash registers, it doesn't bother him. "It's the one time of year you can go to Target and hear *Joy to the World* and that we have a savior. It's a great message."

Why else do we dust off Elvis, fire up Mariah Carey or tune in David Letterman's holiday show highlight, Darlene Love belting out *Christmas (Baby, Please Come Home)*.

Even vegetables carol. For two decades, children by the millions have tracked the virtuous adventures of cartoon Veggie Tales videos. New this year: a Christmas collection using pop-culture motifs to focus on the birth of Christ, says Greg Fritz of Big Idea Entertainment.

In 2009, Veggie Tales had a breakout hit with Amy Grant and Matthew West singing *Give This Christmas Away*. "The song came out during the height of the eco-

*Continued on page 9*

CHOIR OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; OLI SCARFF, GETTY IMAGES; CDS: DAVID BARANTZ FOR USA WEEKEND

## Carols for non-Christians

You need not be Christian for Christmastime music to ring your bells. You don't even have to be religious.

The new album *Atheist Christmas* is aimed at fellow unbelievers who want to sing of love and gratitude, says producer Robert Crenshaw, a Detroit-area singer and songwriter. The title

song's chorus: "I know it's crazy, but so? Ho, ho, ho! We hope to find ourselves in a moment of pure bliss, under mistletoe, with beautiful lights and snow."

And a new two-CD set came out in time for Jews' eight-night festival of lights in December, *'Twas the Night Before Hanukkah: The*

### Musical Battle Between Christmas and the Festival of Lights

The Idelsohn Society for Musical Preservation produced one CD with 17 Hanukkah songs and another with 17 Christmas songs, all written, produced or sung by people with a Jewish heritage.



## Christmas Music

Continued from page 7



CAROLERS: DON HAMMOND, GETTY IMAGES

**BE OF GOOD CHEER:** Caroling door-to-door is a joyous tradition.

conomic downturn," Fritz says. "It reminded people that gifts are about the heart, not the price tag."

Christmas tracks are among the many recordings that Smithsonian Folkways has preserved from around the world. Folkways just completed recording rollicking, percussive Puerto Rican Christmas music. The sound of any local Christmas is "a musical flag of identity, offering a sense of security and connection," says Daniel Sheehy, director of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. He observes that we sing and we play what most matters to us: "Human beings give music its meaning."

J. Mark McVey grew up in a tiny West Virginia town full of churches where caroling door to door was "bred in me." Now, he's a Broadway musical leading man. Christmas songs are still core to his life so he launched *The McVey Family Christmas* album with his wife and daughters.

That's the magic of Christmas music: From classic to country, *Silent Night* to *Santa Baby*, R&B to Broadway, Bach to Bing, you hear it with your heart. ❧