

# The Seasonal Sounds of 2017

by Chris Narloch

**O**utword's print edition recently shone the spotlight on Volume 19 of *Carols For A Cure*, this year's album from Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, which features spirited holiday favorites sung by stars from Broadway's leading musicals including *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Come From Away*, and *Hamilton*.

That's not the only exciting new seasonal music out this year, however. Everyone from Smokey Robinson to Cheap Trick has a holiday CD out in 2017, and we decided to fill your stocking with reviews of several of the high profile discs out this Christmas – plus a couple releases from queer artists.

## Fantasia

### Christmas After Midnight

I was never a huge fan of this soulful singer when she won the third season of *American Idol*. It wasn't until Fantasia came to Broadway and starred in *The Color Purple* and later *After Midnight* that I felt she fully realized her potential as a vocalist.

I don't know what took Fantasia so long to release her first holiday disc, but it was worth the wait because *Christmas After Midnight* is my favorite among this year's new seasonal CDs.

Ordinarily a belter, Fantasia pulls back on her power and delivers a dozen delicious, mostly understated vocal performances on such Christmas classics as "Baby, It's Cold Outside" (with Ceelo Green), "Silent Night" and "Merry Christmas, Baby."

## Sia

### Everyday Is Christmas

I was a devotee of this wacky singer-songwriter, who is fond of hiding her face behind crazy wigs, even before she scored a smash with *Chandelier*, one of the most memorable and unusual singles to hit the pop charts in recent years.

Unfortunately, the prolific performer has been cranking out one project after another since she hit it big, and all her soundtrack songs and solo CDs are putting her at risk of being overexposed.

A case in point is Sia's first seasonal CD, *Everyday Is Christmas*, which contains ten tracks that sound like they took ten minutes apiece to write. (Sia has boasted that she wrote Rihanna's hit "Diamonds" in under fifteen minutes.)

I was hoping for a bizarrely beautiful holiday disc from Sia, and she does write all-new songs, but most of them sound dashed off and feature simplistic choruses – such as "Puppies are forever / Not just for Christmas" – that are repeated to death.

On the plus side, "Snowflake" is pretty, "Ho Ho Ho" sounds like Danny Elfman could have created it, and Sia does deserve credit for writing original songs rather than trotting out the same old seasonal selections that everyone records.

## Gwen Stefani

### You Make It Feel Like Christmas

I apologize to Gwen Stefani's fans in advance, but I could only listen to this disc once before giving it to a friend. I have never been an admirer of the singer's voice, which is thin and lacks power and personality.

*You Make It Feel Like Christmas* did nothing to alter my estimation of Stefani



Gwen Stefani - "You Make It Feel Like Christmas"



Sia - "Everyday Is Christmas"

who, at 48 years old, is still so spectacularly beautiful that I guess it doesn't really matter that she can't sing very well.

The sexy songstress's version of "Santa

Baby" has zero sex appeal, she can barely keep up with Blake Shelton on their duet, and Stefani's original compositions are almost as bad as the tired covers.

## Holiday Inn

### Original Broadway Cast Recording

This cast recording of a recent hit Broadway musical came out earlier in 2017, but the holiday season seems like the perfect time to spotlight a disc that includes fun versions of such holiday classics as "White Christmas," "Happy Holiday," "Let's Start The New Year Right," and the title song.

Bryce Pinkham and

Guaraldi Trio's "Christmas Time Is Here" from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and a reworking of the Wham! classic "Last Christmas," as well as an original track titled "Christmas In Your Heart."

A jazz record for people who feel "blue" during the holidays, "Christmas In Blue" is a short and bittersweet collection from this Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter.



Sam Sparro - "Christmas In Blue"



Fantasia - "Christmas After Midnight"

Corbin Bleu led the gifted cast of the musical on Broadway, but the real stars are the show's great Irving Berlin songs, which include "Blue Skies" and "Steppin' Out With My Baby."

## Sam Sparro

### Christmas In Blue

This handsome gay gentleman recently released his first holiday disc, a four-song EP that includes a new version of the Vince

## Rachel Sage

### Joy!

This lesbian singer-songwriter has been described by *The New York Times* as the "Jewish Norah Jones." Her new holiday collection includes two original Hanukkah songs, a Yiddish ballad, and a cover of the timeless classic "Joy To The World."

Featuring imagery by renowned New York photographer Bill Bernstein ("Disco", Paul McCartney), the physical packaging of the disc also includes a recipe for Romanian latkes contributed by a friend's bubbe, a.k.a. grandmother.