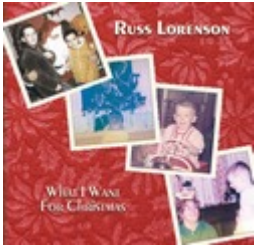


## Sound Advice Curtain Up on Christmas



### RUSS LORENSON WHAT I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS LML Records

To be honest, what I want for Christmas is always *What I Want for Christmas* or something like it - meaning holiday songs I like that don't get recorded as much, plus a singer being able to surprise me with a fresh take on something that's been overexposed. Russ Lorensen has done it. This vocalist, still quite new at the game, has been diligently working on his craft. Judging by this album, he's made tremendous strides in finding his own way with a song and his sound. This has been the album I find myself coming back to quite a bit. It fulfills the potential evident in his debut CD, *A Little Travelin' Music*. He works with several of the same musicians, led by the ace pianist-arranger-producer Kelly Park, and does repeat one track from that album, the affectionate "Christmas in San Francisco." (That's where he's based, and he has some Christmas-oriented and other gigs there, as noted on his website, where the albums can also be sampled.)

Russ's clear and enthusiastic voice is well suited for ringing out with holiday cheer. He opens with the recent "My Favorite Time of Year," written by the young jazz pianist/singer Peter Cincotti and family, a lively tune that's as straightforward and uncluttered as Russ's general sensibility. Another refreshing choice comes right away: "I Guess There Ain't No Santa Claus" (Johnny Mercer/ Barry Manilow/ Eddie Arkin) - it's sort of the blues with a light touch and a wry smile. A perky and playful little novelty Bing Crosby and others once played around with, "Little Jack Frost, Get Lost," is brought back and tossed around like a snowball in a four-song medley about the cold weather. From the score of *White Christmas*, Russ digs into "Snow," joined knee-deep in glee by terrific Terese Genecco, Kristopher McDowell and Alexandra Kaprielian.

The revelation comes with, of all things, Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn's "The Christmas Waltz." Most singers play up its ingratiating swiny rhythm and make it a light bit of fluff. Here, it is very much slowed down, and - eureka! - a serious, tenderly romantic piece of material has been lurking there all these fifty-plus years. Russ makes the most of it in this five-minutes-plus version, letting us linger languorously over the images, giving them an added weight and importance. What a beauty, and Kelly supports him all the way with thoughtful piano accompaniment and graceful solo. On the other hand, or the other side of the coin, a jaunty "I'll Be Home for Christmas" doesn't really work for me, because how can you ignore the sad last line "if only in my dreams"? Though I'll admit that the zippy pace of the melody itself is nevertheless invigorating this way, like a brisk blast of cold air on a winter's walk.

When you're in the mood to vent about the glut of cute-factor famous Christmas songs, and thus suffering from sugar poisoning, enjoy "If I Hear Another Song About Christmas," another song about Christmas. But this one throws darts at very specific warhorses, and has its own comic twist, handled well here by our singer. Russ, who has also been performing a Tony Bennett tribute, has some of that man's mix of warmth and humor and definitely a hearty helping of his joie de vivre.

- [Rob Lester](#)