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Elvis' Christmas Album****RCA/Speakers Corner LOC 1035 180g mono LP**Produced by: **N/A**
Engineered by: **N/A**
Mixed by: **N/A**
Mastered by: **N/A**Review by: Michael Fremer
2007-12-01

Elvis delivers the album opening "Santa Claus Is Back In Town" on this fall of 1957 release with bawdy, bluesy, burlesque-like delight. There's nothing in his voice that's even remotely subtle when he sings "Santa Claus is coming down your chimney tonight," or any of the rest of the tune's normally innocent lyrics. At one point in a break Elvis utters some guttural grunts not normally associated with Christmas no how! This probably had teenaged girls tingling and their parents repulsed.

Almost all of side one is taken in an over the top kitschy, campy style that's infectious, surprising, at times funny and yet always utterly sincere.

Elvis at times makes fun of the "Elvis persona," but never Christmas, as he reinvents "White Christmas," "Here Comes Santa Claus (Right Down Santa Claus Lane)," "I'll Be Home For Christmas," "Blue Christmas," and "Santa Bring My Baby (Back to Me)." Elvis sounds comedically Cher-like (in retrospect of course) and almost feminine singing "White Christmas," for instance, in a loping, cowboy-on-the-range-like arrangement. Apparently Irving Berlin found Elvis' "White Christmas" "profane" and tried to have the album banned from the radio, but why, won't be apparent to anyone today.

On "Here Comes Santa Claus..." he playfully changes intentions within a line chameleon-like, going from sincere to salacious. When he sings at the end "cause Santa Claus comes tonight," you may not know what to think, while his take on "I'll Be Home For Christmas," is thrilling for its sincerity, spontaneity, daring and dexterity.

Yet despite Elvis's obvious skills titillating teens, he brings a genuine religious fervor and intensity to side two's opener "O Little Town of Bethlehem" that will stop you in your tracks. Elvis, the chorus (The Jordanaires and Millie Kirkham) and the backing musicians, including Scotty Moore, Bill Black, and D.J. Fontana among others, make you *feel* the 1957 Christmas season vibe. If you're old enough to remember what Christmas *felt like* back then, you'll know what I mean when you get to that tune.

Presley ups it a notch on "Silent Night," by the end of which the old folks are saying "this guy's not bad," or maybe even better. The ensemble nails it live. The side continues with songs of faith that Elvis delivers with southern gospel warmth and intensity, ending in "It Is No Secret (What God Can Do)," which, by the time it's over has mom and pop flipping it over and wiggling their hips to side one.

The Radio Recorders Hollywood sound is intimate, delicate and pure. It's a spectacularly well-textured monophonic recording that offers great depth and a natural presentation.

The package reproduces the full sized, full color booklet featuring some spectacular shots of the young Elvis in all his youthful glory. Whatever the source and whoever cut it, this reissue sounds superb. What a fantastic Christmas present from Speakers Corner! Thank you!

Profane or sacred?

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