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# Sue Russell says: Merry Christmas Two...um, Too...er, To You!

By "CP" Christopher Peppas

Suffice it to say that Sue Russell has done it again...for the very first time. How can that be? Well, by way of explanation, Sue Russell has just released her second Christmas album in as many years.

It is true to say that "An Evening in December" is like no other Christmas album you ever heard. And it's completely different from the first effort, even though many of the same people contributed to them both.



Let's backtrack just a little to flesh out what we're trying to get across. Sue was putting together the first Christmas CD, a reimagining of several arrangements of Christmas songs done by the

multi-instrumentalist and musical tour-de-force that is Joe Turano.

They had been tucked away in the corner of a California closet when Turano stumbled upon them and he and Sue breathed new life into them.

The pandemic did its thing and after months of delays, fits and starts and restarts, the mission was accomplished and the opus, which featured more than a couple of Christmas tunes that took the road less traveled. And it was marvelous.

The last of the snowbanks had barely melted when Sue, Joe Turano and the rest of the usual suspects headed back to the Tanner-Monagle Studios in downtown Milwaukee and set out to do the impossible: top themselves.

The collective mass of talent has done just that.

“Our process was similar to the first two CDs (Some Other Time),” Sue said. “As much as possible, I like the tracks to be laid down by everyone in the studio at the same time, the result being more like a live performance than an over-produced sterile recording.”

Sue went on to say “that’s when the magic happens.” Sometimes mistakes turn into happy accidents and they end up not on the cutting room floor, but on the final mix.

It’s when serendipity turns sublime. “That’s why I love the way “Jingle Bells” turned out,” Sue explained. “While doing vocals, Jeff (Stoll) and Joe decided something was missing. They read each other’s minds instantly and it was the guys echoing “jingle jingle” on the last modulated verse. We laughed the whole time.”

The playfulness and the fun they all were having making this music comes through and feels like kids playing outside after the season’s first snowfall.

“An Evening in December” is the title cut that takes place on the 25th as you might imagine and the songs on it go from the playful, like the aforementioned “Jingle Bells” to the poignant “Mary, Did You Know?”



The latter being a hushed but haunting ballad about Mary and whether or not she knew what was happening and that the Baby Jesus would grow up to save the world and deliver us from all iniquity.

Sue Russell’s crisp, clear vocals waft ever so gently on top of the instruments which are layered underneath and land gently like on a favorite mattress.

The “Men In Black” give us their unique take on a variety of genres from the aptly named “Christmas Waltz” and the bouncy “Silver Bells.” That classic pairs the keyboard prestidigitation of Jeff Stoll which is punctuated throughout by Turano’s sax.

There is a very jazzy song -- “Ships” -- that was a new experience for this reviewer and is simply a little sliver of bliss. Ditto for “(I will give you) Love for Christmas.”

There’s a reason that Sue Russell and the mass of musicianship that is drawn to play with her has been entertaining audiences for five decades and more.

You don’t have to take my word for it. But you should. That’s because “An Evening in December” will captivate you during this and every holiday season!

The former executive with Easter Seals of Southeastern Wisconsin continues to impress us in her second chapter.