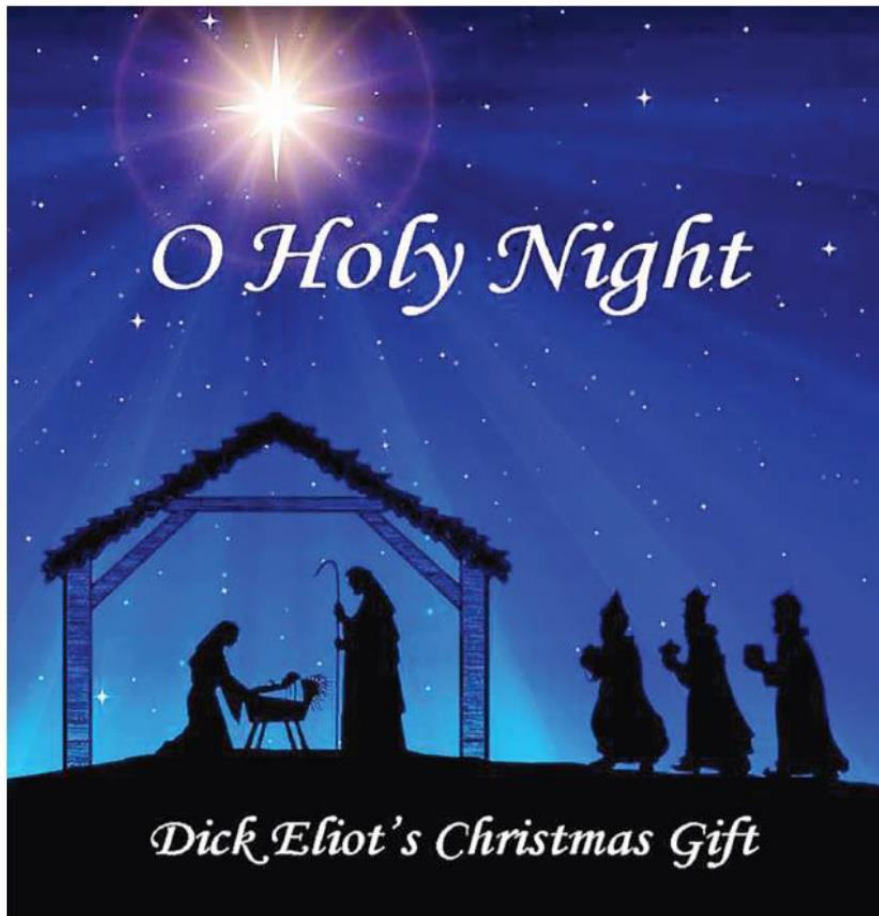


Dick Eliot's O Holy Night: 'This one's for Mom!'

By "CP" Christopher Peppas



You could say that Dick Eliot had an Epiphany of sorts when it came to selecting the songs and subject matter for his latest album: "O Holy Night!"

"I wanted to record a Christmas album," Dick said. He wanted to pay homage to his deep and abiding faith. This is nothing new. There has been a spiritual connection of some kind in all of Dick's recordings.

"This one's for Mom," Dick said. "I titled it O Holy Night." That was her favorite Christmas Carol and the cover art was carefully crafted to reflect that night in Bethlehem all those years ago.

When a musician of Dick's caliber and pedigree says he

wants something done, it gets done. The Musical Magi, consisting of Dick, percussionist extraordinaire Johnny Garcia and the meticulous sound engineering of Gary Tanin, curated and laid down this sixteen-song opus.

It will immediately take its place among your collection of music that will be played year after year for generations long after we are all in the ether.

Dick is an amazing guitarist who continues to perform at a high level well into his 80s. He performed on The Strip in Las Vegas for thirty-seven years and, until just recently, had a residence there for fifty-seven years.

A modest man, that is all Dick wanted this to say. But the icons, the veritable show business giants, that he played with need mentioning, if only to provide the listeners with some context.



Brothers Dick and Don Eliot.

We'll just list some here, in no particular order: Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Barbra Streisand. During a recording session, Dick told an anecdote about playing on Perry Como's hit "It's Impossible."

The songs are all traditional, you have heard them before. But it is the simplicity that is most striking. What Robert Browning did for poetry and Mies van der Rohe did for architecture -- "Less is more" -- applies to this recording.

In this auto-tuned, over-produced world



Dick Eliot Playing at County Clare, Milwaukee.

of music today, you have a man, a guitar, vocals and a little sweetening here and there with the various toys of percussion. On the opener "What Child is This?" you can hear the ocean gently lapping against the shore underneath Dick's gentle picking.

For the vocals, Dick Eliot goes back and forth between narrator and singer which is reminiscent of Fred Astaire in his movies. "O Holy Night!" is the best example of this.

"Angels We Have Heard on High" has almost a 60s Rock & Roll pace to it which is apropos especially when it gets to the *fa la las* peppered throughout.

The upbeat and jazzy "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is a lively rendition that hits the right note right up until the

fadeout. You can add "Carol of The Bells" to this list and "We Three Kings" is on the waltz-y side of the genre.

Dick gives "White Christmas," "The Christmas Song," "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and "Joy to the World" a dash of Latin flavoring and they do not disappoint.

Then, there is the bouncy cadence of "Here We Come a Caroling" and steady beat of "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem" along with "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" are a delight.

This recording is special in so many ways. It is heartfelt, poignant and elicits the feelings of Christmases past and Christmases yet to be.

You will savor the artistry and emotions it brings for some time to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CP Christopher Peppas is a journalist, jazz vocalist and conga player in the Greater Milwaukee area and Correspondent at Large for the *Jazz Unlimited Newsletter* and a Field Editor for *Our Wisconsin Magazine*. He contributed to this recording playing sleigh bells and tambourine.



Jazz guitarist Dick Eliot has mingled — and performed — with legendary musicians like Tony Bennett and Elvis Presley. Credit: Journal Sentinel