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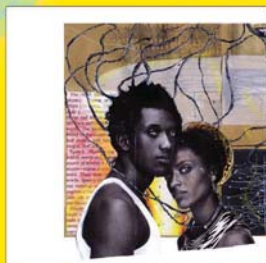


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IMMORTAL GIANTS

A four-disc Charles Mingus set is a highlight of our seasonal shopping guide for music fanatics

Charles Mingus (Photo: Joseph L. Johnson)



UNBRIDLED BIRD

CHARLIE PARKER'S ALTO SAXOPHONE remains one of the most recognizable sounds in the history of recorded jazz, even 65 years after his death at age 34. Despite recording for fewer than two full decades, the bebop progenitor played a leading role in helping to define a bold new era of the music starting in the early 1940s. This year, a handful of albums, books and prints are being released to mark the centennial of Parker's birth.

"One of the things he was particularly strong with was making use of just a few ideas," said bassist Fumi Tomita, who released *Celebrating Bird: A Tribute To Charlie Parker* (Next Level) in September. "'Donna Lee' is a good example, the Dial versions: He takes two choruses, and if you look at them, the second chorus isn't the same as the first. But it's incredible how it's similarly constructed."

"He kind of had a platform that he was improvising off of, so the same ideas come up again," Tomita continued. "One of the reasons he's such a genius is that he was able to play these lines starting on any part of the bar. It wasn't always a carbon copy; beat 1, he wouldn't play the same thing. It was such a part of him, he was able to bring that motive into a different light. And he would change it rhythmically or melodically."

Charlie Parker: The Mercury & Clef 10-Inch LP Collection (Verve/UMe) brings together five albums Parker made with producer Norman Granz in the late 1940s and early '50s: *Bird & Diz* (a 1950 recording that features Parker and Dizzy Gillespie fronting a quintet with pianist Thelonious Monk, bassist Curly Russell and

drummer Buddy Rich), *Charlie Parker* (which is bookended by hard-driving takes of "Now's The Time" and "Cosmic Rays"), *Charlie Parker Plays South Of The Border* (where Parker takes on everything from "Tico Tico" to "La Cucaracha"), and the crossover landmarks *Charlie Parker With Strings* and *Charlie Parker With Strings* (Vol. 2). The LPs are pressed on black 10-inch vinyl and feature newly remastered audio from the original analog tapes.

The savvy and boundless improvisations on the Mercury and Clef sides helped shift the genre toward a new vernacular that's still being drawn upon today. And while there's no dearth of musicians capable of Bird's aerial feats—if not his imagination—there's an overarching context, something beyond sound and vocabulary, that still makes the saxophonist a marker for contemporary jazz players.

"For a long time, Charlie Parker's music was considered modern, and if you look at the history books, they call bebop 'modern jazz,' which in 2020 is ridiculous," said Tomita, an assistant professor in the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. "Modern jazz is very different—it's almost as far away as King Oliver or Louis Armstrong. ... But there's still the idea of music as art, and that's how Charlie Parker thought of [his work]. I believe today's jazz musicians still have that—what we play is art."

Jazz album covers conceived of by well-regarded designers and artists have long been admired by collectors and celebrated in books. Now, David Stone Martin's framed illustrations of the album covers for *Charlie Parker*

With Strings, *Charlie Parker Big Band* and *The Magnificent Charlie Parker* are available from uDiscover Music and Verve in three canvas sizes.

Then there's *Chasin' The Bird: Charlie Parker in California*, a graphic novel from Z2 Comics that's offered in two versions: a standard hardcover edition that includes a flexi-disc, and a deluxe edition that comes with a limited-edition 45-RPM single and three art prints. The book itself, drawn by Dave Chisholm and colored by DreamWorks Animation Director Peter Markowski, covers the West Coast sojourn Parker took in 1945. During his time in Los Angeles, Bird cut definitive sides like "Orinology" and "Yardbird Suite," both issued in 1946 on the Dial label.

That latter tune is included in the newly released *Charlie Parker: The Complete Scores* (Hal Leonard), a 400-page compendium of 40 Bird compositions transcribed note-for-note for alto saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass and drums from the original recordings, complete with solos. The hardcover scores come along with a slipcase, making it an ideal keepsake for musicians as well as Bird fans.

"Teaching bass students, I always give them Charlie Parker heads or solos, because I see them as jazz etudes," Tomita said. "It's a good way to get an idea of how people solo, because transcribing is hard for lots of young students. Through this material, it gives them an idea of what to expect on bebop-style soloing. ... They're technique exercises and they assimilate the language of jazz, and how you imply chords without playing chords." —Dave Cantor



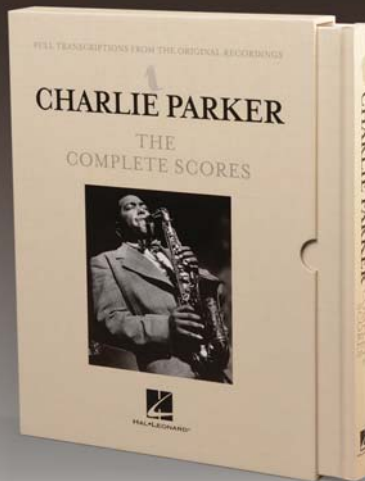
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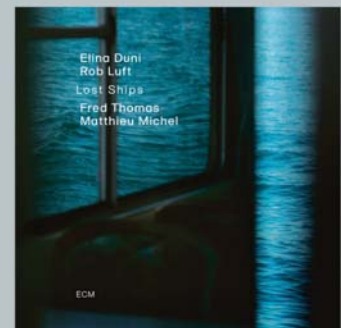
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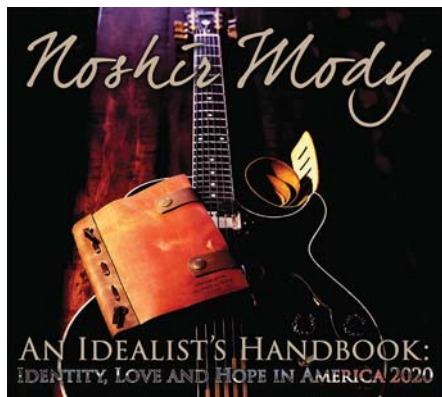
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ARTISTS CELEBRATE THE SEASON

FOR YEARS, VIBRAPHONIST WARREN

Wolf and 3D Jazz Trio pianist Jackie Warren cared not a whit about Christmas music. But they've changed their tune, Scrooges no more, they now rejoice in holiday sounds with the release of Wolf's *Christmas Vibes* (Mack Avenue) and the trio's *Christmas In 3D* (DIVA Jazz). Also in a festive mood is pianist Mike Renzi, whose *Christmas Is: December Duets* (Whaling City Sounds) features singer Jim Porcella.

Wolf's first stab at Yuletide-themed music was when he contributed two tracks and a spoken-word part to the 2014 label compilation *It's Christmas On Mack Avenue*. Wolf's wife and mother-in-law then urged him to do his own holiday album. Wolf refused. Then last December, he played a holiday show at the venue Jazzway 6004 in his hometown of Baltimore. "The concert was awesome," he said. "Once we were finished, I started to think maybe I should do a Christmas project."

On *Christmas Vibes*, Wolf plays vibraphone, acoustic and electric pianos, percussion and Logic Pro sounds; for support, he turned to leading singers and instrumentalists in the region. "Making this record in the middle of the pandemic had a slightly weird feeling," he said. "But overall, the vibe—no pun intended—in the studio was great. I wanted to make every track on this record something that everybody can just have a good time to."

"Vibes and piano have a great connection, a great sound together that takes the listener into another realm. I think the two rearranged songs that'll give people that 'wonder' feeling are 'Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy' and 'Do You Hear What I Hear?'"

Mixed in among the familiar and lesser-known songs in the program is Wolf's composition "Wake Up Little Kids, It's Christmas!" The song has autobiographical origins: "The night before Christmas at the Wolf household is out of control! My kids wake up around 7 a.m. the next day, running downstairs screaming, 'Santa ate the cookies!' There's part of me that's still, 'Bah, humbug,' but I never let that out. I'm just happy to be with my family during the holidays."

Warren enjoyed Christmas growing up in rural Colorado, only to shun it as an adult. "As a pianist," she explained, "you get called upon to play so many Christmas parties that you get tired of playing the expected tradition-



Warren Wolf gets into the holiday spirit with his album *Christmas Vibes*.

al sing-along tunes. Combine this with losing my mom—whose favorite holiday in every way was Christmas—and the holiday ceased to be fun."

In 2014, Cleveland's "First Lady of Jazz" had a change of heart upon meeting bassist Amy Shook and drummer Sherrie Maricle. Both are members of the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, which Maricle leads. "From the moment Amy, Sherrie and I started playing music together, there was an instant element of joyous energy in the way we connected musically and personally," the pianist said. "Because of this joyful energy, many fans have been asking for a holiday album."

Warren remained wary. "It turned out to be one of the most fun, super-swingin' projects I have worked on," she exclaimed. "It definitely reminds me of the feeling I got as a kid, and still get, listening to Vince Guaraldi seemingly granting the world the freedom to take Christmas music out of its traditional box and swing the hell out of it."

Veteran Mike Renzi performed Mel Tormé's "The Christmas Song" many times as the singer's accompanist; he also has served Tony Bennett and other notables during the holidays, recording Christmas albums with Blossom Dearie and Maureen McGovern. "I'm more of a song presenter," he said, "and I try to orchestrate when I play the piano with colors. The harmonies are modern jazz-like, but my first priority is to give honor to the song." On *Christmas Is*, the Rhode Islander and warm-voiced Porcella redecorated the likes of Steve Allen's "Cool Yule" and, yes, that old Tormé chestnut. "These songs celebrate the spirit of the holiday, togetherness and unity, so that turns me on a lot."

—Frank-John Hadley

WHITEHEAD EXPLORES JAZZ CINEMA

IN 1991, A PANEL OF JAZZ MUSICIANS faced an audience of fans eager with questions. One fan cited a cluster of movies—*Lady Sings The Blues* (1972), *'Round Midnight* (1986) and *Bird* (1988)—noting that it was good to see jazz receiving deserved recognition. Most agreed. But multi-instrumentalist Benny Carter politely dissented, suggesting that Hollywood was selling the idea of the jazz world as nothing but addicts and psychotics. “That’s not the kind of recognition I welcome.”

Jazz critic Kevin Whitehead’s *Play the Way You Feel: The Essential Guide to Jazz Stories on Film* (Oxford University Press) confirms Carter’s indictment. Yet, it spins a unique history of the evolving ways that motion pictures have helped shape the perception of jazz. Because there have been relatively few films about jazz—only about 70 by Whitehead’s count, from *The Jazz Singer* (1927) to *Bolden* (2019)—they’ve held sway.

Whitehead focuses here on movies about jazz, not featuring it. Soundies, documentaries and most shorts and cartoons are covered in two earlier guides, David Meeker’s *Jazz in the Movies* and Scott Yanow’s *Jazz on Film*.

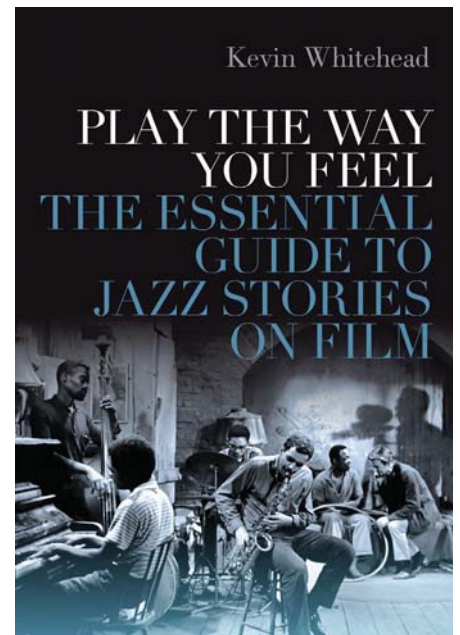
The earliest jazz films were shorts of artists like Bessie Smith and Duke Ellington. But with

the breakthrough of swing in 1936, jazz went big time, and Hollywood beckoned with a series of well-intentioned but fictionalized movies on the music. Made in the Jim Crow era, these films had to make white audiences identify with the music’s “tainted” black origins. Since African American protagonists could not be trusted with this task, filmmakers created charming white heroes to confer acceptance upon jazz and argue its cause on behalf of its originators.

Themes of modernity and authenticity addressed more subtle but sanitized subtexts of class, race and cultural appropriation. Today, these movies are viewed as period pieces inside period pieces. And “all period pieces,” Whitehead astutely notes, “are about when they’re made as much about when they’re set.”

After the demise of the big bands, jazz lost its commercial allure. So, Hollywood began to probe its more sensational sides. Tragedy replaced modernity, pinning the scarlet letter of addiction on jazz for decades.

This 400-page volume is actually too brief an overview of the complex dialog between jazz and cinema. Whitehead’s analysis is always lively, and mostly generous toward a topic he thoroughly loves. He points out what films got right and what



they got wrong. There are countless connections and cross-references, but each chapter is a free-standing essay, making this book easy to cherry-pick and wander around in.

—John McDonough

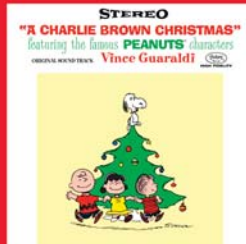
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Recordings of Charles Mingus' 1964 and 1975 performances in Bremen, Germany, represent two very different periods of the bandleader's career.

MINGUS ABROAD

CHARLES MINGUS—RIGHTLY OR WRONG-ly—is frequently characterized as a wildly inventive but frustrated composer, caught between mindful brilliance and the realities of the world he had to navigate.

It's an idea revisited on the four-disc *Charles Mingus @ Bremen 1964 & 1975* (Sunnyside), where the bandleader is frozen in time, first as a figurehead of the avant-garde and then a decade later as an elder statesman of the genre.

The fecundity of live recordings from the bassist in 1964 doesn't make the music here any less enticing: Reedist Eric Dolphy flies through "Hope So Eric" and trumpeter Johnny Coles spouts gold on a 33-minute version of "Fables Of Faubus." That's just disc one.

"Around '64 is when he's really experimenting and thinking broadly about his compositions and how to communicate with the musicians who are playing his work," said Nichole Rustin, a history professor at the Rhode Island School of Design and author of *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* "And then in '75—this is when he's recognized as a senior musician. He was getting his flowers, as they say."

During a decade of both growth and tumult, Mingus continued honing a distinctive voice, one that retained a familiar sonic strain. As baroque as some of the music would become, and despite a slower pace of recording in the late '60s and early '70s, blues and swing remained incandescent ingredients in Mingus' compositions.

"I'm thinking of a quote by Stanley Crouch about Mingus' music, where he says that Mingus

recognizes that if a form of music was good in the '20s, it's good now," Rustin said. "And I think that investment in the traditions of the music, expanding the boundaries of it while keeping the core there, is what Mingus was invested in."

During the 1975 performance, "For Harry Carney" ties the band to the past while paying tribute to a reedist who long served in Duke Ellington's band. But there's also the stately swing of "Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love" and an admittedly outside take of "Cherokee."

A profound list of musicians, political figures and relatives are referenced in the bandleader's song titles, too—everyone from Dolphy to governors and the bassist's wife. But even if "Sue's Changes" alludes to an arts magazine that Mingus' wife ran, there still are myriad possible interpretations of the title. Maybe it's about her development as a person. Or a reference to a progression that Mingus, who died in 1979, wrote with her in mind. Maybe it's something totally different.

"What I like about when Mingus writes a song for you, it really is about honoring what you're bringing to him—and consequently to the music," Rustin said. "So, really, 'Sue's Changes' is all about celebrating and appreciating [their] relationship."

Wading through *Charles Mingus @ Bremen 1964 & 1975* might not reveal the meaning of the 15 tunes here, but it sets a scene. And it places one of the genre's most consequential composers on a continuum of development as a writer, a bandleader and a person who moved through this fraught world.

—Dave Cantor

MARY LOU WILLIAMS, WRIT LARGE

MARY LOU WILLIAMS WAS AN IDIOSYNCRATIC composer, arranger and pianist whose 60-plus-year career remains ruthlessly hard to synthesize. And as Tammy L. Kernodle, author of *Soul on Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams*, observed, jazz critics previously have been predisposed to discuss Williams via hollow comparisons to her female contemporaries.

When Williams began performing live in Pittsburgh during the 1920s, she idolized Chicago pianist and bandleader Lovie Austin, who perhaps was best known for accompanying blues singers like Ida Cox and Ma Rainey (and purportedly tooling around Jazz Age Chicago in her leopard-skin upholstered Stutz Bearcat roadster). But instead of replicating her sound, Kernodle explained, Williams helped facilitate “the progression of ragtime, blues and stride bass piano styles,” noting that those “elements are the undercurrent of her style.”

The innovative Williams also served as connective tissue between stride piano and bebop. Even early in her career, Kernodle said, Williams was “engaging with the blues in unique ways in which few arrangers in the ’30s and ’40s were using them.” Her arrangements foreshadowed “the advanced harmonic language that we hear in bebop in the late 1940s and ’50s.”

In *Soul on Soul*—which in October was published in paperback for the first time by University of Illinois Press—Kernodle explained that during that time, Williams, no stranger to experimentation, was playing “what she called zombie music. This style, according to [Williams], consisted of “mainly ‘outré’ chords and ‘out’ harmonies based on ‘off’ sounds.” Later, she was friend and mentor to countless younger artists, including Bud Powell and Dizzy Gillespie.

She also mentored bopper Thelonious Monk—a relationship that dated back to 1934, when he was 16, she was in her 20s and the pair met in Kansas City, Missouri.

Interspersed with Williams’ trio recordings—which rank among the setting’s most

inspired works—were expansive, large-scale compositions and Catholic masses. *The Zodiac Suite* from 1945, which was performed by the New York Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, became a signature for the pianist, and yet, Kernodle laments, the work seldom is properly lauded.

“We’ll say, ‘Oh, look, what he did—that was progressive,’” Kernodle said about Duke Ellington’s *Black, Brown and Beige* suite from 1943. “But we won’t talk about *The Zodiac Suite*.”

Williams’ career transpired with the backdrop of her working out of her Harlem apartment in the 1950s and ’60s to help addicted musicians return to performing, efforts that led to her founding the Bel Canto Foundation to help rehabilitate drug users.

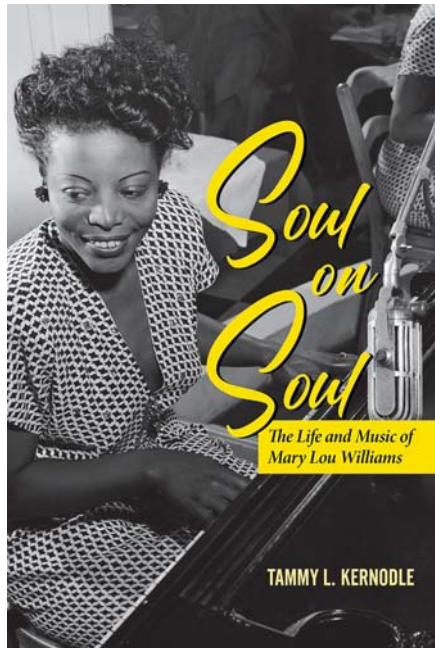
But compounding the difficulties of being Black in 20th-century America and the oppression attached to that reality, Williams dealt with being pitted against other female performers of the era by

jazz critics. Kernodle contextualizes those conversations as “representative of the larger way in which men try to frame women who move in spaces that they see as male centered. White jazz critics were always selling Mary Lou as the symbol of real jazz. Hazel Scott was always being signified as not being authentic jazz. But ultimately, there was a sense of sisterhood between them.” Williams and Scott, the author continued, generally weren’t seen as “progressing the idiom, or maybe even exceeding these men that we have established as the masters of the art form.”

In her book, Kernodle explained that the result of skewed criticism around Williams’ work resulted in a focus on her being a novelty, rather than an equal to her male peers. In 1943, *Time* magazine determined that she was “no kitten on the keys ... not selling a pretty face or a low décolletage.”

Conversely, Kernodle’s *Soul on Soul* serves as an essential text, working to set the record straight on one of the genre’s most significant—and conspicuously ignored—composers.

—Ayana Contreras



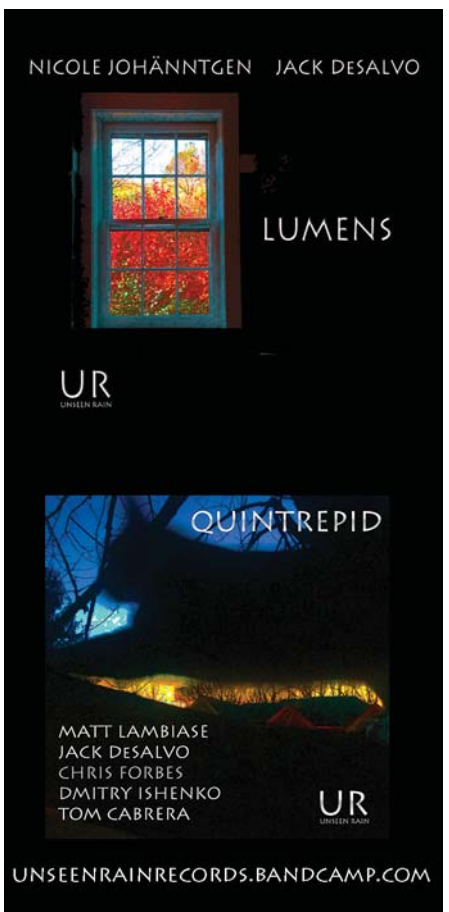
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Légère Reeds has added The American Cut reed for alto and tenor saxophone to its Signature series. Designed to fulfill the needs of jazz artists, The American Cut draws material from the edges toward the center spine of the reed to strike a balance of responsiveness and control. legere.com



Mute Keeper

Mute Caddy's 2020 Artist Model clamps directly onto the shaft of a music stand to hold a variety of mutes for brass instruments, making them easy to access during performances and rehearsals. Made from ABS plastic, the new version features an improved mechanism that is lightweight and more portable than the original, and it also includes two holes for mouthpieces. A storage bag with multiple pockets is sold separately. If you're a brass player who typically sets your mutes on the ledge of your music stand, the Mute Caddy Artist Model is the perfect accessory to keep your gear protected and organized so you can focus on the music. themutecaddy.com

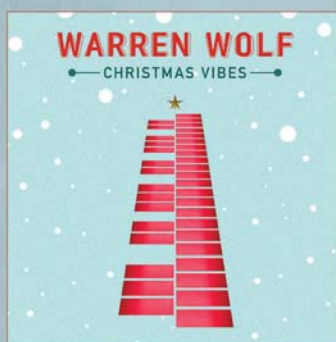


Cap the Gap

The GapCap from KeyLeaves has a spring wall design that flexes to fit the neck socket of all saxophones. You can instantly remedy a loose-fitting saxophone case by expanding the GapCap screw to secure the horn. A lock nut lets players find their favorite position and lock it in place. The GapCap also serves as a shock absorber, and it vents air to help prevent moisture buildup. keyleaves.com

WARREN WOLF

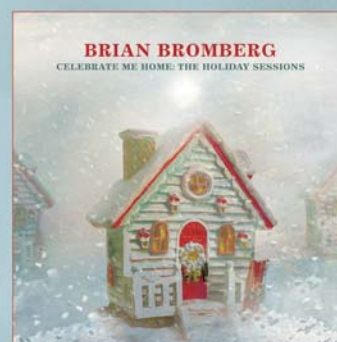
CHRISTMAS VIBES



Warren Wolf returns this Fall with his first Holiday record. Updating classics such as "Do You Hear What I Hear?," "Winter Wonderland" and "Christmas Time is Here." *Christmas Vibes* includes one original composition: "Wake Up Little Kids It's Christmas" with vocalist Allison Bordlemay.

BRIAN BROMBERG

CELEBRATE ME HOME: THE HOLIDAY SESSIONS



Putting his own spin on Holiday classics, Brian Bromberg has compiled some of his favorite Christmas tunes. On his first Holiday record, Brian reimagines classics such as "Deck The Halls," "Let It Snow," and "You're A Mean One, Mr. Grinch."



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