

**Various artists *A Christmas Heritage*** [Koch International KOC CD 8030 (1998)] Put such talented instrumentalists as Todd Phillips, Tim O'Brien, Darol Anger, Mike Marshall, Phillip Aaberg, and Alison Brown together with the idea of music for the winter holidays and you know something interesting is bound to happen. Inventing and collaborating across the bounds of musical tradition, the six come up with original and tasteful takes on holiday standards including "Greensleeves," "Patapan," and "Shalom Aleichem." They also offer four new tunes which stand well with the seasonal favorites. A nice blend of the lively and the contemplative spirits of the season. (KD)

**Riders in the Sky *Xmas the Cowboy Way*** [Rounder 11661-0445 (1999)] Listeners can almost see the reflected campfire flickering on the faces of Ranger Doug, Woody Paul, Too Slim, and their friends in this collection, on which the Riders bring their trademark humor into a mix of old standards and modern tunes. The breadth of the music is impressive — from a couple of songs with real kid appeal (collected during their many television appearances) to the smooth harmonies (though very different from their usual style) of standards "The Friendly Beasts" and "I'll Be Home for Christmas," to yodels and polkas. The touching, newly penned "Virgin Maria (Why Are You Weeping?)" celebrates the Mexican influence on western music. The Truth in Advertising Award should be presented for "Let It Snow/The Last Christmas Medley You'll Ever Need to Hear," a brilliant musicological exposition of the common roots of modern era Christmas songs. One highlight is the hauntingly beautiful treatment of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," a 12th-century melody that is often heard on instrumental collections, but is reverently presented here with simple accompaniment on accordion, placing the real emphasis on the beautiful words of this hymn of hope and inspiration. (SH)

**Laurie Lewis & Tom Rozum *Winter's Grace*** [Signature Sounds SIG1251 (1999)] Laurie Lewis and Tom Rozum offer an acoustic blend of winter season ideas that are at once familiar sounding, but not at all the well-known standards of the season. They range beyond the contemporary bluegrass sound, for which they are best known, to include Merle Haggard's "If We Make Through December" and Jean Ritchie's "Winter-grace," as well as the traditional "Cold Frosty Morning." Inviting the listener to deeper reflection without being too solemn, Rozum's instrumental "Snowy Road" and Stephanie Davis' border story "The Gift" are particular standouts. (KD)

**The Falcons *Canadian***

rockers, an uptempo "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Jingle Bell Rock," and then delivers a stunning Buddy Holly-tinged romp through "Angels We Have Heard on High" that will raise the little hairs on the back of your neck. A must for the CD changer at your next holiday party. (MP)

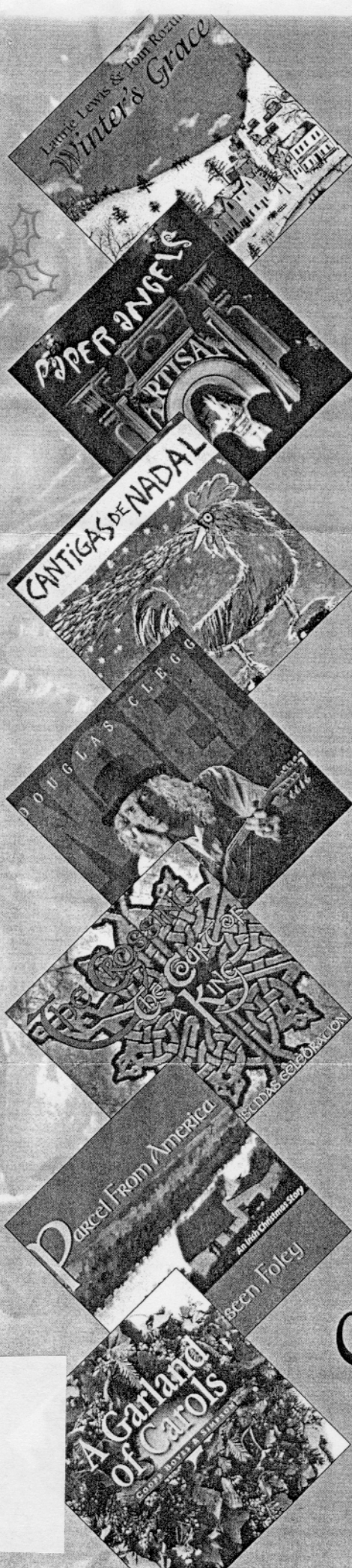
**Gypsy Soul *Sacred*** [Off the Beaten Track GS7714 (1998)] These gypsies have been the generous sort to many a charity, and in that spirit they celebrate Christmas and keep on giving. The Foundation for Advancement in Music Education is the recipient of proceeds, and you are gifted with *Sacred* — Gypsy Soul's inspired reworking of traditional holiday tunes. The Canadian/British duo features vocalist Cilette Swann and multi-instrumentalist Roman Morykit, whose fretless bass skills are particularly pleasurable. *Sacred* is their third outing, and Gypsy Soul's sweet and soulful Celtic-flavored soft rock is an enjoyable departure from the typical saccharine-riddled Christmas carol. (SM)

**Patricia Spero *Celtic Christmas Harp*** [New World NQCD 461 (1999)] On this soothing, calming recording, Patricia Spero plays the Celtic harp, which rings with softer, sweeter tones compared to the concert harp, its overfed brother. Many of the carols are familiar favorites performed solo or subtly blend flute, percussion, and cello into the arrangements. Indeed, there are many introspective, reflective moments, which, in a sense, separate the soul from perceived reality. In addition to the traditional carols, Spero includes some delightful out-of-the-way compositions like "Gabriel's Message" (Basque), "Wake Now Ye Shepherds" (Bohemian) and even "Stars of Ice," a traditional Chinese tune that shimmers like a cold wind whipping its way through hanging icicles. (DW)

**Various artists *The Gift*** [Weather-Vane WVM003 (1998)] To the lover of traditional Christmas music, this collection of carols sung by upcoming singer/songwriters may not work. For more progressive-minded listeners, this disc features solid performances by artists who stay within their own zone, yet really feel the spirit. The guitar work is often interesting and some, like Jason Harold or the Vigilantes of Love, accompany themselves on harmonica, thereby conjuring images of the shivering, busking performer playing unnoticed by seas of tunnel-visioned shoppers. Claire Holley's contributions of "Once in Royal David's City" and "Joy to the World" are especially celebratory. Overall, *The Gift* succeeds as a niche Christmas recording. (DW)

**The Crossing *The Court of a King. A Celtic Christmas Celebration***

# Seasonal Recordings



## Dirty Linen

The magazine of folk and world music.