

BRANDON HEATH CHRISTMAS IS HERE

Brandon Heath has some hard and fast rules about Christmas.

- 1) Christmas music *always* sounds better on vinyl.
- 2) Parents should *never* lie to their children about Santa Claus.
- 3) Decorating should never, *ever* commence *under any circumstance* until the day after Thanksgiving.

Call it a pet peeve or a personal mantra, but the Emmy Award winner, five-time GMA Dove Award recipient and five-time GRAMMY nominee says there's only a specific window of time every year to celebrate. For Heath, Christmas isn't officially ushered in until he sees Santa bringing up the rear in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, but his first holiday outing, ***Christmas Is Here***, provides the perfect nostalgic soundtrack to kick off the most wonderful time of the year...so long as it's post-Thanksgiving.

"I want people to just hear a song and slip back into the past," he says. "Good Christmas music is really about sparking people's memories and inviting them into the story of Jesus' birth."

Heath has dreamed of creating a Christmas album for a long time, writing quite a few songs along the way in anticipation for a future holiday release. In the end, he wrote the three originals that made the album in the few months leading up to recording and enlisted some friends to make the process memorable. Sonja Isaacs, Ellie Holcomb and Matt Wertz all contributed background vocals, and Ben Shive (Andrew Peterson, Matt Wertz) produced the album, which was recorded in mid-July.

In addition to three new songs, ***Christmas Is Here***, rich in musical diversity, features seven classics, giving Heath a chance to experiment. "We adopt the music that our parents listen to as our own," Heath acknowledges. "I really wanted to reflect the diversity of the records I listen to during the holiday season. I wanted a good variation of styles, and it's one of the few kinds of albums that you can get away with that."

Heath looked to some of his favorite Christmas albums for inspiration—recordings by Nat King Cole, Harry Connick, Jr., Patty Loveless and Kenny & Dolly—desiring to craft a timeless release fans would want to pull out year after year. "The Christmas Song" sets the tone with its big band vintage feel and Heath's warm, upfront vocals. In contrast, "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "Angels, We Have Heard On High" blend to create a formal, "high church" sounding moment. "Silent Night" finds Heath singing a cappella with a full choir, while his Americana version of "The Bleak Midwinter" features layered background vocals from Holcomb.

Although all of the standards intentionally stay true to their original compositions, Heath changed the melody on "Go Tell It On The Mountain," featuring Isaacs. The Dove award-winning songwriter decided to record the well-known spiritual when he discovered it was written by a fellow Nashville native, choral director John W. Work, Jr., in 1907. He also added a new verse to his bluegrass-tinged arrangement.

Two of the three new songs reveal Heath's witty personality. "Every good Christmas record has funny songs," he insists. "The Day After Thanksgiving" pokes fun at the Christmas commercialism that sets in at the end of summer, leading most to completely overlook fall, one of Heath's favorite times of year. He co-wrote the track with Ross Copperman and Lee Thomas Miller, two writers he collaborated with for *Blue Mountain* and *Leaving Eden*.

He says he remembers thinking, "*How can I make this record my own? What are some of my own ideals and beliefs about Christmas?*" And that's one strong conviction I hold, so I thought it would be fun to write a song calling out people, like the mall, who decorate too early."

“Momma Wouldn’t Lie to Me,” co-written with Shive and Andy Gullahorn, is equally as lighthearted, with Heath putting his parents on the spot for the truth about Santa, mirroring a real-life conversation from his childhood. Parents should rest assured no child-like beliefs will be harmed due to the listening of the song though. “No spoilers!” Heath proclaims.

In his trademark storyteller fashion, Heath highlights a lesser known character in the Christmas story on the poignant “Just A Girl”—the innkeeper who turned Mary and Joseph away. The true meaning of Christmas shines through on the track, co-written with Miller in the back lounge of Heath’s bus last May.

“I took a little creative license to tell what happened,” he explains. “I think he probably saw Mary, and he didn’t want, honestly, a disturbance in his inn, so he turned them away... As a storyteller, I just love a little more insight into something people wouldn’t normally know.”

Through the innkeeper’s eyes, Mary is seen as an ordinary girl, but Heath notes the irony of the scene. “There’s a story [about] when a non-believer asked a Catholic, ‘Why is Mary so crucial to the Christmas story?’ And the Catholic says, ‘She’s just a girl who said yes.’ I think that says a lot for us,” Heath offers. “God is often giving us opportunities we don’t realize the significance of, but we just need to say yes. God can do things through ordinary people. Mary was just a girl, but she was also a catalyst in a huge event in the rest of history.” Heath asserts we should say “yes” to Christ in every moment He gives us, especially during the fleeting window of time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s.

Christmas Is Here celebrates the best facets of the days leading up to December 25—the memories, the traditions, the joy and the meaning. There’s a reason Heath holds out to celebrate. He longs to keep the season sacred.

“It’s like a good surprise, like a present. You should wait and open it when it’s time instead of opening it as soon as you get it, and then there’s nothing special about it anymore,” he says. “I think you should restrain yourself and say, ‘Okay, I’m not going to fully engage in this until it’s time.’ And Christmas is one of those things for me. I want people to savor the moment...just wait.” However, if you happen to listen to ***Christmas Is Here*** this year a little early, he’d probably be willing to overlook it.

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