## MATT WERTZ SNOW GLOBE

When pop singer/songwriter and Nashville resident **Matt Wertz** goes back home to Kansas City for Christmas, a top priority is to recapture the spirit of his childhood holiday experience. The same goes for his first seasonal album, *Snow Globe*, a fresh wintry mix of nostalgic favorites and classics-informed originals made to shake up and settle down your festive December gatherings for years to come.

"I do whatever I can to relive the traditions; I love to soak it all in," admits the single romantic. "It all begins Thanksgiving night when we go out to a lighting ceremony at the Country Club Plaza. And then closer to Christmas I make sure there's plenty of time with my family, so I can get in on decorating sugar cookies and putting together puzzles like we did when we were kids."

Matt's musical style compares to guys like John Mayer and Jason Mraz, but on *Snow Globe* he fully embraces whatever genre a chosen song calls for in accordance with his merriest memories. Taking on idyllic opener "Walking in a Winter Wonderland" in joyful reverence, he sings with a smile as bells jingaling, a big band plays along, and a bright string section lights up the track. Maintaining a fun air of jazzy doo-wop, "White Christmas" nods to The Drifters' version from *Home Alone*, his favorite holiday movie.

At the Wertz house, on a street where neighbors still line their front yards with luminaries on Christmas Eve, Amy Grant's chestnut "Tennessee Christmas" was in heavy annual rotation. A natural choice for *Snow Globe* considering that, along with Matt's acoustic roots, the past meets present as Grant adds harmonies to his standout new rendition, which stays true to the original.

"I knew from the beginning that I wanted to record this one," he says. "Brown Bannister, who first produced the song, also produced my vocal parts on *Snow Globe*, so he called Amy and asked if she would sing with me. That's like the cherry on top; it's a huge honor for me."

Other covers amidst the warmhearted, wide-eyed album appear like gifts from behind the windows of an Advent calendar; comforting elements of the season that we all love to anticipate. Vince Guaraldi's "Christmas Time Is Here" from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* makes a smooth connection back to Charles Schulz's animated characters practicing their pageant. "O Holy Night" glows with the candlelit tones of an angelic children's choir. "Sleigh Ride," grand enough to launch the Macy's parade, is a faithful recreation of Leroy Anderson's 1950 orchestral standard right down to the clip-clop of the horse and a trumpet's impression of the stately equine.

The velvety "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" provides another example of something a musical craftsman like Wertz especially loves about the songs of the season: timeless melodies.

"The deep musicality of Christmas really resonates with me, and I knew recording *Snow Globe* would give me the chance to sing those timeless melodies. With a song like this you just can't go wrong," he says. "Having said that, I've also got to commend Brown Bannister for making sure I did my best with it. I probably sang this one fifty times before we got it just right—a painstaking process that he managed to make enjoyable."

For the *Snow Globe* originals, producer/musician Ben Shive (Andrew Peterson, Chris Tomlin) preserves the pop essence of what Matt does the rest of the year while decorating it with retro touches of rock and soul. The imaginative title cut is candy cane sweet, instantly delectable power pop defined by one of Wertz's best word pictures yet: *It's a glitter blizzard wonderland*.

Fit for a feel-good yuletide film, the hustling and bustling "Christmas Just Ain't Christmas" is fashioned after a rocking Tom Petty holiday song ("Christmas All Over Again") inspired by the 1960s R&B wall of sound. New York's iconic scenery provides the twinkling backdrop to "Christmas in the City," a gentle, Michael Bublé-flavored ballad for all the lovers out there. "Wake Up, Wake Up" finds Matt back in his childhood, opening presents to a Motown groove.

"This is my attempt at capturing the spirit of a 5-year-old on Christmas morning, the excitement that is only found in a child," he says. "When I was that age, I woke up early once, snuck down to the tree, opened one of my presents, and then rewrapped it before anyone else got up."

Today, **Matt Wertz** finds more pleasure in giving than receiving—to reflect on his upbringing and just being able to go home again are gifts enough. He remembers his grandfather, a pastor, reading from the Bible the night before Christmas and leading the family in a few hymns ("I will always be able to hear his voice in my head"). There are recollections of descending the staircase with his three younger sisters; mom's "gift of the heart" present that emphasized caring before spending; driving to St. Louis the next day to see his dad's parents and celebrate all over again.

The most autobiographical moment on *Snow Globe* is in the closing "Christmas Just Does This to Me," a warm blanket of a song co-written with friend and award-winning artist Brandon Heath.

"The line about falling asleep on the couch by the tree and drifting off to the sound of the dishwasher humming in the kitchen is my personal experience. I mention *It's a Wonderful Life* and love its double meaning in the context of the song as well as singing about Mary and Joseph on the lawn and Jesus being born—just the weight of what's happening. Christmas music really paints a picture and takes people somewhere special."

Indeed, it does. We all have our images of what the holiday should be; our sensory reference points from a baby in a manger or presents under a tree to the scent of pine or a song in the air. Matt's brightest hope is that *Snow Globe* will be worthy of becoming a part of your traditions.

"I just wanted to make something to break into that handful of Christmas albums people look forward to playing every year," Wertz concludes. "I made it for my family in hopes it will make their holiday playlist. I figure if I can do that, maybe it will make other people's playlist, too."

As great as **Snow Globe** sounds, that's a Christmas wish that should soon come true.