

Merry and Bright!

Thoughts and musings about Christmas, holidays, books, music, and mental ephemera...

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Album Review: Two from Ken Elkinson

Ken Elkinson is an artist from Venice, CA via Cedar Grove, New Jersey and the greater New York area. Ken has released two Christmas albums, "Generations of Yuletide" in 2008 and "Christmas Ambient" in 2012.

"Generations" is an album featuring solo piano interpretations of 16 Christmas songs, blending traditional carols such as "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "Greensleeves" with contemporary songs, including "The Little Drummer Boy" and "I'll Be Home For Christmas".

"Christmas Ambient" is, as you astute readers have already surmised, a collection of Christmas songs performed in the ambient music genre. The 16 tracks include traditional favorites ("Deck the Halls", "Away In A Manger", "O Come All Ye Faithful"), beautiful holiday songs that may not get the "A-list" play ("Bring A Torch Jeannette Isabella"), and a few songs new to me, such as "The Truth Sent From Above".

Now, I don't know much about the ambient music genre (perhaps the King of Jingaling will comment here for us). What I have discovered while listening to "Christmas Ambient" is that the music is, first of all, very pleasant, soothing, and beautiful. Secondly, the music is masterfully crafted, subtly layering sounds together to create the flowing theme and foundation of each song, then gently adding the melody, ultimately creating a listening experience that you absorb rather than hear. Ken's work is, to me, the ambient music novice, very pleasant and surprisingly complex.

"Generations of Yuletide", Ken's earlier Christmas release, is a quite enjoyable work. Ken's talents as both a pianist and arranger/interpreter are evident. For a quiet evening of Christmas music and a glass of wine with a loved one, "Generations" is perfect.

A couple other things about Ken. First he is a prolific (and generous) musician. Visit his website to learn more about his album releases through the years, including "Music for Commuting" a 60 track CD set of soothing music, for those who commute through snarling and crazy traffic. Information about "Music for Commuting" and all of Ken's other releases is on his web store page.

Second, Ken is hilarious. His wit is apparent in the liner notes in "Generations". And, dig these highlights from his "Case History":

8/28/72 - Ken Elkinson is born in Cedar Grove, New Jersey. His grandmother comments that he has long fingers and predicts that he will play piano.

3/39/97 - Ken debuts Midnight Conversation during a release party jam-packed with crazed fans. The event is compared to the Beatles arrival at J.F.K.

11/1/00 - [Ken] declares himself the David Hasselhoff of solo piano when Reverly reaches the Top 20 in airplay on over 70 radio stations, including several in Germany.

4/1/04 - Due to Ken's meteoric rise to fame, a bitter east coast/west coast new age war breaks out between himself and John Tesh.

Finally, here's the best part: a sampler collection of Ken's music. Ken has allowed me to provide to you a few songs from his two albums. So, here is a link to a ZIP file containing four tracks from "Generations" and five from "Christmas Ambient". I hope you like them, and if you do, visit Ken's website or other online retailers and pick up the whole collection.