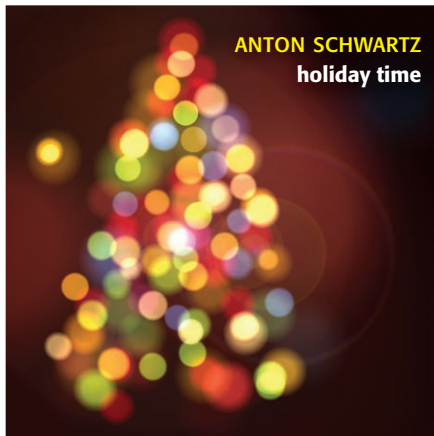


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Anton Schwartz



HOLIDAY TIME—Jingle Bells; Winter Wonderland; The Christmas Song; Sleigh Ride; In The Wee Small Hours of The Morning.

PERSONNEL: Anton Schwartz, tenor sax; Art Hirahara, piano; John Wiitala, bass; Tim Bulkley, drums.

By Winthrop Bedford

When I was growing up, we used to begin hearing Christmas music on the radio, and in department stores after Thanksgiving. Over the proliferation of Christmas music in advance of the actual holiday has crept up closer and closer to Labor Day. The chain stores remove their Halloween, Easter, or Valentine's day products and decor the day after those holidays end. Similarly, I think Christmas music now starts the day after Halloween—and just a shade after Thanksgiving, I've usually reached sensory overload on it.

All that notwithstanding, I actually like many of the Christmas songs that have been composed—of which many of the most memorable one are

products of American composers since the 1930s.

For me, the acid test is whether the music holds up at other times of the year, and makes me feel great. Anton Schwartz is a terrific tenor saxophonist—and his Holiday Time album fits that bill. His inventive treatment of “Jingle Bells” as a medium up-tempo jazz waltz starts the album off with a bang. Schwartz and Art Hirahara on piano turn in swinging deftly crafted solos. Next up is “Winter Wonderland.” I have always been drawn to this composition because of the beautiful melody and colorful harmonic places to which this song travels. The unexpected reggae groove that Anton arranges for this piece is a pleasant, toe tapping surprise. “The Christmas Song” is one of those pieces of music that is simply so beautiful, so perfect in its simplicity—melody and chord changes. For accomplished players, it would be a challenge not to sound great on this, and difficult not to elicit sentimental responses from listeners. Schwartz breathes his beautiful and expansive tone into this ballad—taken, quite naturally, slowly and subtly. I get a similar feeling from his performance as I did listening to Coltrane's ballads album. Schwartz offers another interesting arrangement on Leroy Anderson's colorful “Sleigh Ride,” which is performed in 7/4 time, with a Latin, backbeat kind of groove. I thoroughly enjoyed the great feeling from each of lyrical and fluent solos served up by Schwartz and Hirahara. The album concludes with a magnificent rendition of the classic “In The Wee Small Hours of The Morning.” The only drawback about Holiday Time is that the album has a total playing time of 27 minutes and 32 seconds. That notwithstanding, it is a superb album, bubbling with a combination of imaginative and sweet sounding playing—enjoyable year round.