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Holiday Music From Eleanor McCain

NAUGHTY AND NICE

by: Consuelo Bernardi



Toronto-based singer [Eleanor McCain](#) has just released her fourth album, just in time for the season aptly named, *Holiday*. The two disc CD of holiday songs falls into two collections that create two distinct sentiments — a “*Naughty*” side of up-tempo and jazzy secular selections and a “*Nice*” side of intimate and traditional choral tracks.

The album features special collaborations with professional chamber choir, *The Elmer Iseler Singers*, classical singer *Cindy Townsend* and a special debut performance by *Laura David*, Eleanor’s young daughter.

Following the success of her ECMA nominated third album, *Green Hills of Home*, Eleanor felt drawn back to the recording studio to record the Christmas music she had been dreaming of doing for many years. Recording these songs, in fact, soothed her soul and provided some much-needed comfort and peace following a painful year and the death of

her beloved father.

“Music evokes emotion and stirs warm memories,” says McCain. “For me, as with many families, sentiments run deep at this time of year and nothing does that more than holiday music. This just felt like the right time for me to record this CD.”

With a childhood of picturesque, snowy, family-filled Christmases in Florenceville, New Brunswick, Eleanor spent much of the holidays singing in Christmas concerts and performing in church while her mother played the organ. Music proved to be a key ingredient to those memories and traditions and it is no surprise that collecting and listening to beautiful Christmas music became a personal passion for Eleanor. She credits her mother with passing down that passion and has dedicated this CD to her for that reason.

The album is sure to become a favourite every season - it's the perfect accent to a holiday dinner with family or a holiday cocktail party with friends.

The two-disc CD contains recordings of 19 familiar and classic holiday tracks....grouped into 'naughty' and 'nice' discs, *“We had a lot of fun with that theme,”* says Eleanor. *“It made sense for the CD, but I think it also helps people fit the music to the occasion. A quiet night at home with family is ideal for the traditional or ‘nice’ songs while an evening entertaining friends is a better occasion to play those on the ‘Naughty’ CD.”*

The “Naughty” CD takes an up-tempo twist on familiar hymns and carols such as “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” and “What Child is This?” Secular favourites such as “What Are you Doing for New Year’s Eve?” “The Christmas Song” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” have a distinctive jazz influence that suits evening entertaining with close friends.

The counterpart CD — “Nice” — features a special collaboration with Canada’s foremost chamber choir, *The Elmer Iseler Singers*. McCain’s soaring vocals combined with the powerful choral sound creates a stirring effect and evokes a sense of splendour and occasion. Together they recorded “Once in Royal David’s City,” “What is this Lovely Fragrance?” “Lo, How a Rose E’re Blooming,” and “Away In A Manger.” “Amazing Grace,” also with the choir, is a song which is deeply personal for McCain and is dedicated to the loving memory of her father. It was one of the most poignant moments when performed by McCain and *The Elmer Iseler Singers* at his funeral.

As Christmas is a sentimental season, Holiday reflects the importance of spending time with friends and family creating long-lasting memories. Most notable is the musical debut of McCain’s young daughter Laura David who officially continues the musical lineage which began with her grandmother, Margaret McCain. Laura and Eleanor’s duet in “Let There Be Peace on Earth” illustrates the importance of tradition and the role of beautiful music at Christmas.

Last week I had a chance to connect with Eleanor and we spoke about all things Christmas...

What is your favourite childhood Christmas memory?

I have so many fond memories of Christmases in Florenceville, New Brunswick. I loved the pure childhood excitement of waiting for Santa and Christmas Day to arrive. I loved the stillness of the quiet country Christmases in the village Florenceville where I grew up. I remember one Christmas when we had a snowstorm on Christmas Day. That evening we walked to my uncle's house after dinner to visit his family. There was so much snow that there were no cars on the road. My parents, my sister, our Labrador dog and I bundled up and walked down the middle of the road as the snow softly fell. It was such a beautiful Christmas moment to share with my family and so peaceful. I always think of that Christmas. I remember the Christmas Eve's at church with my mother playing the organ as I either sang in the choir or I sang a solo. We always had special times with extended family at Christmas. Christmas was always a peaceful and reflective time. It still is.....

And of course, I remember last year, my last Christmas with my father who passed away this year.

If you had to pick your Top 3 all-time favourite Christmas songs?

This is a tough choice for me since I love many Christmas songs!

Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas - The words bring me back to Christmas's in years gone by. It also speaks to being with those who are most dear which is what Christmas means to me.

Lo' How A Rose E'er Blooming - This is an elegant Christmas song that has stood the test of time. (The music and harmonization were written by German composer Michael Praetorius in 1609.) The harmonies in this piece are gorgeous and I always find them moving. They invite the reflection and stillness that I love (and yearn for) at this time of year.

O Holy Night - The words and music are very moving for me. It also reminds me of singing this on Christmas Eve with my mother playing the organ at church.

Best Christmas present you ever received?

My childhood friend, Neil Brennan, sent me a piece of the Berlin Wall in 1989. He was in Europe at the time and he traveled to Berlin when the wall fell. He sent a piece of it home to me in a small box for Christmas. It was such a poignant gift to receive at Christmas. I still think about it.

Worst Christmas present you ever received?

Well, I can't say that I ever received a Christmas gift that would fall into this category. But I did receive a 40th birthday gift a couple of years ago that could be the worst gift ever. My boyfriend at the time (it has since ended....) gave me paper cocktail napkins with vintage images of RCMP officers on them for my birthday. Not exactly the most personal gift given as we were in a serious relationship. :)

 **Your Christmas wish for this year?**

To continue to have peace, love, good health and comfort in not just my life, but for others as well.

Eleanor McCain's 2-CD 'Holiday' set will be available for \$19.95 through her website, eleanormccain.ca

And if you are in the Toronto area, you can catch Eleanor McCain live in concert:

 **December 4, 2011**

The Albany Club
91 King Street East (at Church Street)
2PM (Tickets available by calling 416-217-0537)

 **December 11, 2011**

Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto
115 Simpson Avenue, Toronto
9AM and 11AM services

 **December 11, 2011**

Lowe's Toronto Christmas Market
The Distillery Historic District
3PM

We have a B-sides giveaway - you could score one of 5 copies of Eleanor McCain's album by answering this question, in the comment field below....

Which of the tunes are more your style? The 'Naughty' or the 'Nice'?

Yummy Rules and Regs: You must be a Yummy Mummy Club member to win.

Click to [sign up!](#) It's free and filled with perks. One comment per member.

Entries accepted until December 11, 2011. Contest open to Canadian residents.

Winners will be picked using www.random.org.