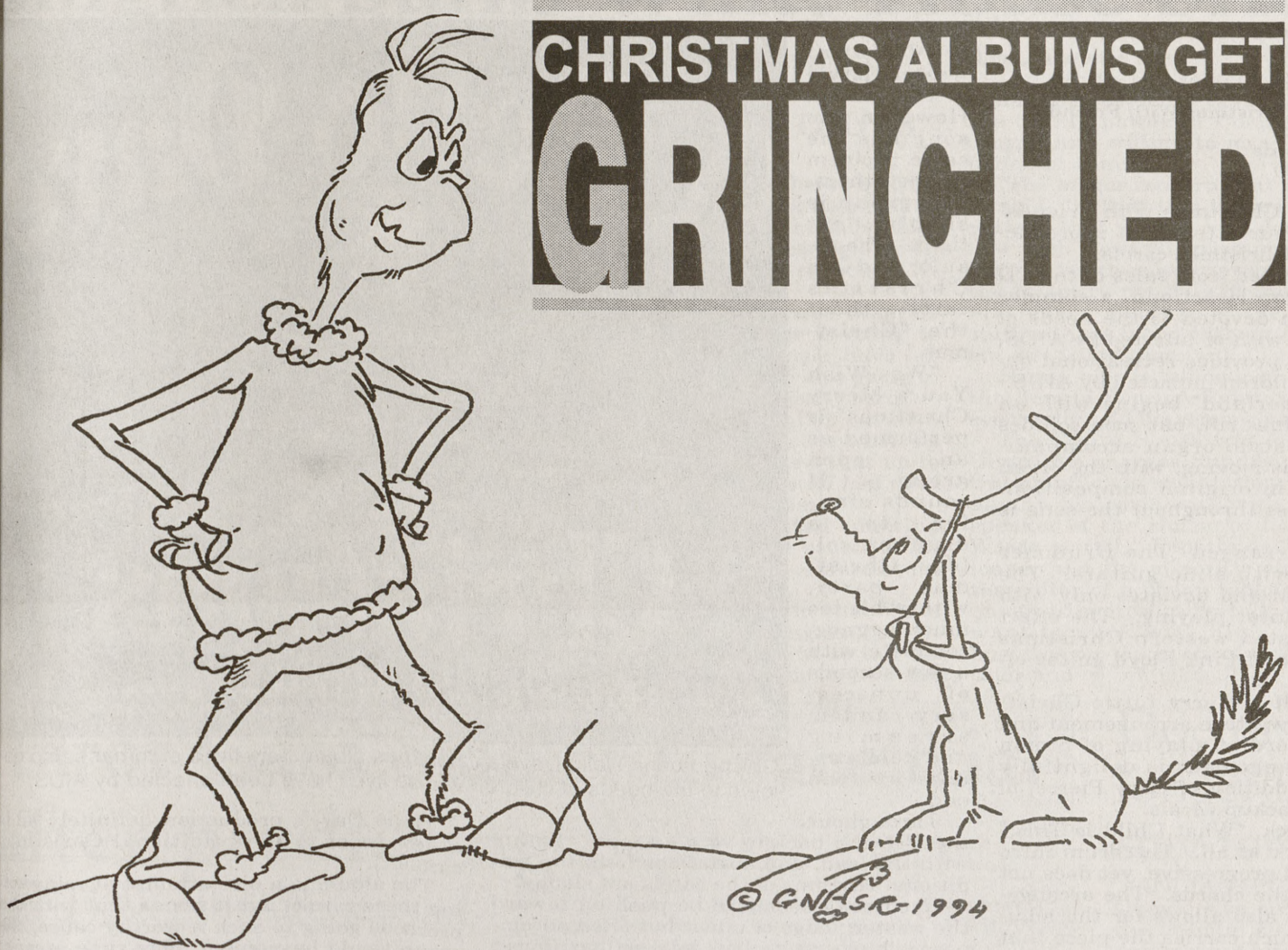


CHRISTMAS ALBUMS GET GRINCHED



Anderson's 'Time' runs out

By Nick Georgandis
THE BATTALION

"Christmas Time"
John Anderson
BNA Entertainment
★ (out of five)

The label on John Anderson's "Christmas Time" promotional CD reads "Not For Sale." Oh, if only America was so lucky.

Anderson's attempt to play off his stunning musical comeback with this holiday release fails miserably. There is a certain sound that Anderson's voice complements perfectly, and this is not it.

The album's 10 tracks include two new holiday tunes written by Anderson himself.

The second of these is the album's best song, "Jesus Our Savior," a somber, religious ballad that puts the gift giving frenzy in perspective. Anderson keeps his voice low on this one, letting the guitar and the lyrics please the listener.

Other than that, the only track worth listening to is Anderson's remake of "Jingle Bell Rock." Anderson has some leeway to jam a little, getting close to the rockabilly beat that first made him a hit with "Swingin'" and later spearheaded his surprising comeback on "Seminole Wind" and

"Money in the Bank."

The only other highlight of the album is the gorgeous steel guitar on "The Christmas Song." It takes the place of the traditional Christmas strings and does a beautiful job. Unfortunately, the steel guitar plays second fiddle (excuse the pun) to Anderson's half-hearted bellowing.

Rounding out the album are Christmas-time favorites "Winter Wonderland," "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and "Silent Night."

Anderson also butchers "Blue Christmas," the song no one has done justice to since Elvis Presley recorded it and "The Night Before Christmas," in which Anderson simply reads the Yuletide classic.

Anderson's voice is made for rocking, not storytelling, and I can name quite a few dozen people I'd rather hear read this classic.



John Anderson

If you like country Christmas music, go with the Judds or George Strait. If you like Anderson's sound, go with "Country 'til I die" or "Seminole Wind." It's one or the other — Christmas music and John Anderson just don't mix.

Rockers mangle holiday tunes

By Erin Hill
THE BATTALION

Various artists
"So This Is Christmas"
Atlantic Records
★★ (out of five)

'Tis the season for celebrity Christmas compilation albums. The alternative crowd didn't want to be left out, so they got some grungesters together and recorded their offering, called "So This Is Christmas."

Unfortunately, it leaves the reader saying "So this is it?"

To be fair, there are some nice moments. Tori Amos' "Little Drummer Boy" is one of them. Her piano arrangement is creative and her lyrics are understandable.

Evan Dando's "Silent Night" is also a treat. He chooses to go the acoustic route and turns out a folksy rendition of the most beloved Christmas tune out there. It works, but it's nothing to write home about.

If only Bad Religion been as thoughtful. Their version of "Silent Night" is out of tune, out of style and out of touch. The lead vocalist's straining for the high notes is distracting and the background noise takes away from the meaning of the song.

This is probably the worst song on the album, but Daniel Johnston's "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" is a close second for that dubious honor.



Tori Amos

The album cover he drew is his only worthwhile contribution to this album. The song is rough and the backing vocals are so off-pitch it's hilarious. Johnston's wobbly voice has a certain off-beat charm, but he sounds as if the song is brand new to him, not something he has practiced.

Too many of the tracks sound that way, as if the artists were just singing something for the first time without any practice or polish. Despite their various musical talents, they sound ragged.

Even the current darling of the folk world, Victoria Williams, sounds a bit unrehearsed, though her twang is firmly in place.

Hootie and the Blowfish are adequate on "The Christmas Song" but even their competent contribution doesn't inspire the listener to want to hear more.

Collective Soul also does a decent job on "Blue Christmas." At least they sing in tune.

It is an adequate ending to an OK album. Nothing too bad, but nothing too special either.



Shane Evans, Will Turpin, Ross Childress, Ed Roland and Dean Roland of Collective Soul.

McLachlan graces '34th Street' Soundtrack

By Erin Hill
THE BATTALION

Various Artists
"Miracle on 34th Street"
Soundtrack
Arista Records
★★★★ (out of five)

The real miracle of the "Miracle on 34th Street" remake is the wonderful soundtrack. Even if you have no plans to see the updated version of this Yuletide classic, you ought to splurge for the album.

Sarah McLachlan's exquisite rendition of "Song for a Winter's Night" is reason enough. Since this song is not featured in the movie, this is the only chance you'll have to listen to it.

Her ethereal soprano is its usual breathtaking self and her musical nuances and expression restrained.

Unlike many singers who let loose when they perform well-known songs, she doesn't overdo it. MacLachlan sings of holding the hands of those she loves in a tender voice that could bring a tear to the eye.

This remake of Gordon Lightfoot's song should help to make the tune part of our holiday consciousness, right where it should be.

Joining Sarah McLachlan in the ethereal quality category is the boys choir featured in "Singing." Two other songs by the same composer are also on the album, "Overture" and "Bellevue Carol." Both of these would be nice as background music during your holiday festivities — not too noisy or annoying.

The rest of the album is far more soulful, but just as solid. Aretha Franklin and members of the Fame

Freedom choir boogie down on "Joy to the World" and Ray Charles turns in a bluesy version of "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." Both artists sing as if they were having the time of their lives.

Even Elvis makes an appearance, vocally gyrating his way through "Santa Claus is Back in Town" as a reminder of why grandparents didn't want Mom and Dad to watch him on the "Ed Sullivan Show." Every note he sings is sensual.

Mellow crooners like Natalie Cole and Dionne Warwick are also featured on the album. Cole, who is both an accomplished pop and jazz artist, milks "Jingle Bells" for all its worth and demonstrates her proficiency in both genres.

Her usual powerhouse voice is
See **Soundtrack**/Page 4



Richard Attenborough and Mara Wilson in "Miracle on 34th Street."

'Miracle' a classic remake

By Michael Landauer
THE BATTALION

"A Miracle on 34th Street"
Starring: Richard Attenborough,
Elizabeth Perkins, Mara Wilson
and Dylan McDermott
Directed by Les Mayfield
Rated PG
Playing at Schulman Six and Post
Oak Mall
★★★★ 1/2 (out of five)

In the old days, all movies were Christmas movies. Or at least it seems that way. Our parents all have huge Christmas video libraries and make sure that we are well versed in the Christmas cheer of Frank Capra.

As a good student of black and white (or at least colorized) Christmas movies, I was scared of the prospect of seeing "Miracle on 34th Street," John Hughes' style.

Modern Christmas movies just aren't the same. The plots lack something.

But my apprehension about this remake of "Miracle on 34th Street" was needless worrying. Hughes' screenplay has created a modern Christmas classic. And he did it by rehashing an old plot that will never lose its magic.

Many Christmas movie remakes are huge disappointments.

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Allen's performance as Santa spurs 'The Santa Clause'

By Jan Higginbotham
THE BATTALION

"The Santa Clause"
Starring: Tim Allen, Wendy Crewson, David Krumholtz,
Peter Boyle
Directed by: John Pasquin
Rated: PG
Playing at Hollywood
★★★ 1/2 (out of five)

For those moviegoers looking for a feel-good movie to get them in the Christmas spirit, "The Santa Clause" is just the ticket.

Tim Allen, in a usual comical role, learns the hard way what happens when Santa Claus falls off someone's roof. After Santa takes the fall into his yard, Allen slips into the suit and immediately finds out the responsibilities involved with the jolly man's job.

All the excitement comes just hours after Allen and his ex-wife (Wendy Crewson) argue over whether or not to tell

their young son the truth about Santa. Allen insists that his son should be allowed to use his imagination.

Allen's feelings change, however, when he and his son jump in the famous sleigh and take off to deliver Santa's goodies to children all over the world. After making his deliveries and heading back to Santa's workshop, Allen gets a tour of the big guy's headquarters.

The elves tell Santa he has 11 months to get all his affairs in order before he takes over the big guy's position for good.

Allen's son (David Krumholtz) begins to believe that his father is the real thing, but Allen tries to discourage the thought. But the elves and the reindeer are just too convincing for the young boy.

Allen wakes up Christmas morning in his own bed after falling asleep in Santa's bed, believing that the entire Santa experience was a dream. His son, however, believes otherwise. The young boy goes overboard, telling his

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