

## About “This Christmas Aretha”

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It’s amazing to consider that during the course of her truly illustrious career, the one and only ‘Queen of Soul’ has never recorded an entire Christmas album. A global icon, recipient of some of the highest honors awarded any single music artist, including the much-coveted Presidential Medal of Freedom, a Kennedy Center Honor, an American National Medal of the Arts Award and an unprecedented 18 GRAMMY® Awards (including Best Female R&B Vocal Performance for eight consecutive years), Aretha—known the world over simply by her first name—is happy that at last, a long held personal wish to add her superlative musical skills to a first rate collection of Christmas and holiday-themed songs has been fulfilled. “When I suggested doing an album like this at different times in my career, I was told that Christmas albums ‘don’t sell,’” says the music legend. “But, you know, everything is not about money. Christmas is a very important time of the year to me for many reasons, not least of which is that it surrounds the time of Christ’s birth.”

Aretha’s multitude of loyal listeners will be thrilled that the wait for such a momentous project has been truly worthwhile. Released through DMI Music, “This Christmas Aretha” shimmers and sparkles as the The Queen of Soul puts her definitive stamp on a mix of 11 traditional and contemporary classics associated with the holiday season. Aretha herself produced three tracks, arranged and added her inimitable touch as a pianist to two tracks (“Silent Night” and “14 Angels”). Award-winning producer Tena Clark (whose production credits include Natalie Cole, Patti LaBelle, Dionne Warwick, Chaka Khan and a multitude of other major artists) masterminded seven cuts.

With a super musical cast including ‘A’ list Los Angeles session players such as drummer Ricky Lawson, bassist Nathan East, guitarist Paul Jackson Jr., percussionist Luis Conte; rhythm arrangers Tim Heintz and James ‘Big Jim’ Wright (of Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis fame) and string arranger Bill Meyers; The Fire Choir (directed by Carmen Twillie) as well as Fonzi Thornton, Lisa Fischer, Brenda White and Tawatha Agee (all past background vocalists with Luther Vandross); in addition to Aretha’s musical director H.B. Barnum.

“This Christmas Aretha” is not only a superb record but a momentous event. It’s also a Franklin family affair: Aretha’s sons, singer Eddie and guitarist Teddy, contribute on respectively the Donny Hathaway chestnut, “This Christmas” and the rousing gospel classic, “The Lord Will Make A Way,” which features top flight Detroit musicians and about which Aretha herself simply says, “It’s one of those old time, good time recordings. It’s so smashing, right there on the front burner. Check out that groove!”

That Aretha herself is more than delighted is evident as she speaks glowingly of the project and the songs included therein. “I started talking with DMI and Tena in the summer. They wanted a certain number of traditional tunes and I picked the rest. Tena is a consummate professional and working on this album was both very enjoyable and very easy,” says Aretha, who adds her own



*This Christmas Aretha* is on sale now exclusively at Borders and Waldenbooks stores, as well as on Borders.com.

special ‘personal’ touch with “’Twas The Night Before Christmas,” a spoken word piece that reveals Aretha’s real life sense of humor. “I was just having fun,” she grins, before explaining that a couple of the selections on the album are standard fare for the annual Franklin Christmas gathering. “Every year, I look forward to playing Donny’s ‘This Christmas’ and the same thing with ‘Christmas Ain’t Christmas (Without The One You Love).’ I mean, those songs have to be heard in my house.” Aretha’s version of the Hathaway classic is, as expected, an extra-soulful treat; while Gamble & Huff’s “Christmas Ain’t Christmas” (previously recorded by The O’Jays and Philly group The Ebony’s), a radio-friendly standout, is given a truly rousing workout.

Aretha’s versions of such time-honored standards as the hymn, “Silent Night” (with its beautiful string arrangement enhancing Aretha’s piano accompaniment), “Ave Maria” (which she previously recorded for her *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* album), a plaintive version of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and the album’s stirringly spectacular opening cut, “Angels We Have Heard On High” are delivered with the passion and feeling, long associated with The Queen of Soul. She is, she says “thrilled with this record, cut for cut. Of course, I’m always personally critical because I can hear things I could have done better, but this new album even goes beyond my personal top ten list of my own recordings.”

The Franklin musical magic is evident on the fine ballad, “My Grown-Up Christmas List,” a song co-penned by award-winning producer David Foster; gospel singer Juanita Bynum’s “One Night With The King” has all the flavor of a personal testimony while emerging as a true vocal tour-de-force by Aretha, as does “14 Angels” (from “Hansel & Gretel”) on which she accompanies herself at the keyboard, both reminders of just why Aretha’s artistry has resulted in countless international accolades and awards, including a GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award, GRAMMY Legend Award, five American Music Awards as well as being the first woman inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (in 1987).

A number of the songs on “This Christmas Aretha” will be as familiar to music buyers as they are to the artist herself. “I heard many of them growing up and I am delighted to be recording them,” Aretha says. No doubt, this year will be particularly special for Aretha, her family, friends and her many fans worldwide with the DMI release of “This Christmas Aretha,” the latest accomplishment for an artist whose impact and influence on generations is immeasurable. The daughter of the renowned Reverend C.L. Franklin, Aretha’s musical skills became evident to those around her from an early age. A virtual child prodigy with an amazing ‘ear’ for music, Aretha sang at her father’s New Bethel Baptist Church before going out on the gospel circuit with him during her teens. Congregations nationwide knew they were in the presence of an incredible talent: inevitably following in the footsteps of Franklin family friends like the late Sam Cooke, Aretha stepped into the world of pop and R&B in the ‘60s, making her Columbia Records debut at the age of eighteen.

After a series of artistically strong albums, Aretha moved to Atlantic Records in 1967. The late Jerry Wexler signed Aretha and with her very first release, “I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You),” she began a household

name throughout the U.S. Within her first year with the company, thanks to hits like her now-classic version of Otis Redding’s “Respect,” “Baby I Love You,” her anthem “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman,” “Chain Of Fools” and her timeless “Think,” Aretha Franklin emerged as a global hitmaker, established as ‘The Queen Of Soul,’ setting a trailblazing pathway as the first black contemporary female artist to achieve such unprecedented success.

Through musically brilliant albums—“Aretha Arrives,” “Lady Soul,” “Spirit in the Dark,” “Young,” “Gifted & Black” and groundbreaking sets like “Live at Fillmore West” and the double platinum “Amazing Grace” (the first gospel album to achieve such status)—and constant hit singles (including “Until You Come Back To Me,” “Something He Can Feel” and her own “Daydreaming,” which has become the most covered song in her own catalog of stellar compositions), Aretha constantly broke industry sales records at the same time continuing to build the ever-faithful fan base she enjoys to this date.

In 1980, Aretha began a two-decade-plus association with industry veteran Clive Davis and Arista Records: the result was a whole new level of international fame with “Jump To It” (produced by the late Luther Vandross, who—like so many others—claimed Aretha as a primary vocal influence), “Freeway Of Love,” “I Knew You Were Waiting For Me” (a 1986 duet with George Michael) and “A Rose Is Still A Rose” (produced by Lauryn Hill). “Jewels in the Crown,” a 2007 final album for Arista, included duets with John Legend, Mary J. Blige and Fantasia, as well as Aretha’s showstopping GRAMMY performance of Puccini’s “Nessun Dorma,” which still elicits a standing ovation whenever Aretha includes it in her live shows.

That Aretha is ‘The Queen Of Soul’ is unquestionable and continued recognition has come in 2008 with an NAACP Vanguard Award and her naming as MusiCares Person of The Year by The Recording<sup>®</sup> Academy. The recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the R&B Foundation, an organization she has consistently supported, Aretha received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1979.

Yet, with all of the much-deserved recognition, she remains a ‘natural woman’: she happily recalls that “Christmas in the Franklin household was always about good cooking, great smells throughout the house, hustling and bustling, gift giving, and of course, going to my Dad’s church for the services and for the Watch meeting on New Year’s Eve. For me and my younger sister Carolyn, it was also about wondering how Santa got by us! We had these large French windows and we would look out for the sleigh, look up at the sky and stay up as long as we could to watch out for Santa,” Aretha remembers. “To this day, I always do the family thing at Christmas and I make sure we have a beautiful time.”

With the release of “This Christmas Aretha,” the legendary entertainer says, “I hope that people will find it spiritually uplifting, comforting and enjoyable.” After one listen to this future classic album, it’s clear that music buyers everywhere will continue celebrating—even beyond the season—the gift of Aretha Franklin, her artistry and her music.