

## Boney James - Christmas Present (2007)

Written by bluesever

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01 — *Skating* 02 — *Santa Baby* 03 — *O Tannenbaum* 04 — *River* 05 — *The First Noel* 06 — *Merry Christmas Baby* 07 — *My Grown Up Christmas List* 08 — *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* 09 — *Silent Night* 10 — *Auld Lang Syne* Acoustic Guitar – Dean Parks, Paul Jackson, Jr. Arranged By – Boney James, Darrell Smith, Eric Daniels, Phil Davis, Tim Carmon Bass – Alex AI, Tony Maiden Drums – Dave Weckl, Teddy Campbell Guitar – Dean Parks, Paul Jackson, Jr. Keyboards – Boney James, Darrell Smith, Tim Carmon Keyboards, Electric Piano – Eric Daniels, Phil Davis Percussion – Lenny Castro Producer – Boney James Soprano Saxophone – Boney James Tenor Saxophone – Boney James

'Tis is the season to be jolly and few people capture the joyful Christmas spirit as well as Boney James, as he showed very well on 1996's "Boney's Funky Christmas". 2007's outing, if anything, is even more enjoyable.

You sail into holiday mode with Vince Guaraldi's beautiful *Skating* and that soaring, effortless soprano sax tells you that it's a Boney James outing – and a good one. The lilting,  $\frac{3}{4}$  time song is a perfect vehicle for him to solo over a lovely jazz trio setting. I think Boney James gets the urban smooth jazz vibe right more times than most and on *Santa Baby* he hits it right. It's slow, sexy and has a luscious vocal courtesy of Chanté Moore. Lenny Castro's tricky seasonal percussion provides the finishing touch, as it does with almost all of the songs on the CD.

Throw another log on the fire, cuddle up for *O Tannenbaum*. It starts out smoky and slow then picks up pace and leaves you smiling all over. Paul Jackson Jr.'s guitar solo is very slick and I just love this version, especially when it subsides into a peaceful lullaby at the end. Joni Mitchell's *River* is sprinkled with fragments of a "jingle bells" theme. It's a tender ballad and has a sweet melody – no drums, no bass, no guitar – just that soprano sax and Tim Carmon's restrained piano. It's exquisite.

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The mood stays relaxed for The First Noel, which receives a nice, unadorned treatment. Rick Braun's flugelhorn solo adds just the right touch. I'm not sure holiday music has ever sounded quite this good, and I've been listening to lots! The BJ backbeat is back for Merry Christmas Baby. Angie Stone's vocal is outstanding on this version. Alex AI on bass and Tony Maiden on guitar keep the pot boiling.

A change of pace for My Grown Up Christmas List and Boney is back to the ballads which he does so well. I never seem to be able to resist picking out from most CD's I review a track that belongs on a movie soundtrack – well, here we are again and it's this one. If they make another Bridget Jones sequel I want to hear this on there.

Let's get back to more familiar territory: the melody on Hark the Herald Angels Sing is as clear as a bell on a frosty morning and you'd expect that for a classic like this. Castro's percussion gently drives this and it's all it should be. Silent Night features a vocal by Anthony Hamilton and his church music roots show on this bluesy, gospel slow-burner. Auld Lang Syne is very purposeful and measured. Dean Parks' country-rock guitar touches on this song lend it a real drama and turn a song I don't normally like into something truly original and bewitching.

If you want to sing, dance or just sit by the fireside during the holiday season, this CD has something for you and I hope it's among some good things under your tree! ---Chris Mann,smooth-jazz.de

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