

Harry Connick, Jr. – Music from The Happy Elf (2011)

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01 – The Happy Elf Read-Along 02 – The Happy Elf 03 – Santarrific 04 – Naughty Children of Bluesville 05 – Bluesville 06 – The What Song 07 – The PH Song

[play](#) *08 – Two Scoops of Christmas 09 – The Magic Hat 10 – Operation Yule Tide Turning*

[play](#) *11 – Christmas Day 12 – What A Night 13 – Gotta Be On My Way* Musicians: Neal Caine Bass Harry Connick, Jr. Composer, Narrator, Piano Arthur Latin Drums

"The Happy Elf" is just one of many numbers that Harry Connick, Jr. dished out on Harry For The Holidays (Sony/Columbia, 2003), but this particular song proved to be the seed for cross-marketing manna, which makes it a microcosm of the man himself. Connick has crooned his way into the hearts of millions, proven himself on piano time and again, conquered the silver screen, and taken Broadway by storm, but his most heartwarming talent may be that of "children's entertainer."

The opening track, which puts the music in the background and Connick's Read-Along narration of his book in the foreground, highlights this new found role for the entertainer par excellence, but his piano takes its rightful place at center stage on the rest of the album. While this ten-minute tale may have worked better as a bonus track on the tail end of the album, it provides useful background on the origins of some song titles that follow. "The Magic Hat," which the protagonist uses to travel between the North Pole and Bluesville, features some wonderful N'awlins music, Eubie himself is depicted as an ebullient figure ("The Happy Elf") who

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puts others before himself, the "Naughty Children Of Bluesville" are introduced with drummer Arthur Latin's Gene Krupa-inspired floor tom work, and the town is brought into full view with a bass introduction from Neal Caine.

While many of the strongest performances, like "The PH Song," which has traces of "It's Only A Paper Moon" in its melodic DNA, and "Santarrific," which possesses an Duke Ellington-like bearing, despite its barroom undercurrent, have little overt connection to Christmas, two pieces at the end of the program fit well with the theme. "Christmas Day" has a calming melody that's ready to be soaked in by the fireplace, and "Gotta Be On My Way" sounds like "Winter Wonderland" as viewed upside down through a twisted, Thelonious Monk-ish prism.

While this album can be alternately viewed as a companion piece to the book, a standalone piano trio outing, or a friendly Christmas offering, the important fact is that it puts Connick behind the piano once again, which is cause for celebration in and of itself. ---Dan Bilawsky, allaboutjazz.com

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