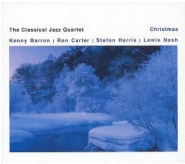
The Classical Jazz Quartet - Christmas (2002)



1 Hallelujah From "The Messiah" 5:18 2 Jesu, Joy Of Man's Desiring 8:38 3 Overture Miniature From "The Nutcracker" 6:26 4 March From "The Nutcracker" 4:47 5 Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy From "The Nutcracker" 6:52 6 Russian Dance Trepack From "The Nutcracker" 5:57 7 Dance Of The Reeds From "The Nutcracker" 6:51 8 Waltz Of The Flowers From "The Nutcracker" 7:23 Bass – Ron Carter Drums – Lewis Nash Piano – Kenny Barron Vibraphone, Marimba – Stefon Harris

The Classical Jazz Quartet recorded a series of sessions utilizing Bob Belden's arrangements of classical music, though this session draws primarily from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite. The cast of musicians, including pianist Kenny Barron, vibraphonist and marimba player Stefon Harris, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Lewis Nash, is never less than impressive, though the album production and, occasionally, Belden's charts don't always serve their considerable talent. Handel's famous Hallelujah from The Messiah is a promising start, though it is strangely and suddenly truncated by a rapid fadeout just over the five-minute mark. Better is the extended workout of J.S. Bach's Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, which gives the musicians a chance to stretch out. The remainder of the album is devoted to music from The Nutcracker Suite, which duplicates the music heard on The Classical Jazz Quartet Play Tchaikovsky, meaning that those already owning that CD aren't likely to purchase this release for just two new tracks. "The Swingin' Nut" (Overture Miniature) is a bluesy chart that gets stuck in a boring vamp instead of developing upon its famous theme as a source for improvisation. But the remainder of Belden's arrangements inspire top-notch performances, especially the playful "Blues à la Russe" (Russian Dance Trepack) and the delicious bossa nova treatment of "Mirlitonova" (Dance of the Reeds). Highly recommended for listening, at any time of year. ---Ken Dryden, AllMusic Review

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