

Lucas Hoge - Christmas Is Here (2017)

Written by bluelover

Sunday, 23 December 2018 13:50 -

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*1.Christmas Is Here 04:59 2.Christmas In Our Town 03:05 3.White Christmas 03:16
4.Christmas Medley 03:55 5.Silent Night 03:58 6.It Wasn't His Child 03:37 7.Ho Ho Home For
The Holidays 02:43 8.Without Christ In Christmas 03:57 9.The Christmas Song 03:46
10.Baby's Got A Present 03:47*

It seems appropriate that 25 years after my favorite country-Christmas album was released (Garth Brooks, *Beyond The Season* - see anniversary review here), a new challenger emerges with an equally delightful and charming set of festive tunes. Inspirational singer, Lucas Hoge - riding high on the success of his album, *Dirty South* - brings his earthy charms to a new seasonal album, *Christmas Is Here*. A collection of original and classic Christmas songs, Lucas lets his expressive voice bring an array of emotion to this special time of year. So whether you are searching for some cheeky fun, reminiscing musings or uplifting cheer, you are on to a winner with this ten track collection. With influences from the world of gospel, inspirational pop and country, it is also a diverse collection that gives a rewarding experience you'll want to relive year after year. The album opens with the title track, *Christmas Is Here*. This beautiful, relaxed mid-tempo ballad paints a vivid picture of why Christmas is, indeed, the most wonderful time of the year. Set to elegant piano, a vibrant guitar riff and a shuffling percussion, Lucas sings with a sweet sincerity, guiding the mellifluous melody through the verses through to that soaring chorus. The segue at the end into *Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas* is a stroke of genius; the whole song leave you with a warming glow that sets the tone for the entire album. *Christmas In Our Town* continues Lucas' exploration of his own memories so closely linked to the season. He is an evocative narrator, conjuring up images of angelic choirs, snowy landscapes and family/friend reunions. The piano work here is just lovely - a lilting arrangement that really swathes Lucas' vocals with a graceful accompaniment. It is the type of song that makes the worries of the world melt away as you get lost in the mesmerizing music. This blends perfectly with *White Christmas*. It is notable how Lucas' own compositions stand shoulder to shoulder with these exquisitely crafted tunes that have lasted for decades. He gives the arrangement just the slightest infusion of shimmering jazz, making you want to sway along to his singing. The instrumental is just as pivotal to the overall effect of the song as Lucas' vocals, and he isn't afraid to let the band take center stage. *A Christmas Medley* takes us through an array of

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standards that Lucas manages to make sound like he should have sung them all along. O Come All Ye Faithful is a resonant, reverent take on the carol that highlights the majesty of the words through Lucas' gorgeous baritone. He then picks up the pace for the journey We Three Kings take. This gives the aura of the listener being right alongside them as they follow that yonder star. A brief diversion to My Favorite Things is a treat before God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen reminds us once more of the true meaning of Christmas. Moving into a full version of Silent Night seems to signify that there has been some careful thought put into the track listing of the album - the central song in a trilogy that shine a light on the spiritual aspect of the holidays. It is hushed and humble, with some wonderfully textured harmonies. These help the listener feel like voices from across the world are coming together to celebrate the birth of Christ. It Wasn't His Child, with the best use of violin since Paula Abdul's Rush Rush, tells Joseph's story - what is rather striking about this song (other than the actual words and how Lucas sings it, with a stirring infusion of admiration) is how the story of Joseph and Mary seems perfectly suited for country music. Achingly poignant and a masterclass in how to uncover hidden nuances in a well known story.

Ho Ho Home For The Holidays really underscores the anticipation that comes with waiting for the big day to arrive - and how being with loved ones is (and should be) more important than the commercial onslaught that December seems to bring year after year. The relaxed rhythm is like a hug from an old friend you haven't seen in an eon, drawing you into the warm embrace of Lucas' serendipitous singing. The understated chorus is actually earworm, wiggling it's way into your brain - you can imagine all your family singing along to the ho-ho-home in unison, stood around the tree, egg-nog in hand. Talking of family, Without Christ in Christmas stirs memories of my childhood. My mum always taught me as a little lad (and to this day), not to write Xmas as it erased the Christ from Christmas. It is why she sat nodding wisely when I played her this song! Lucas explores that lesson across the album, but most eloquently on this sombre song. I like that it is thought provoking and earnest without seeming like preaching. He just poses the question and leaves you to find your own answer. As the album draws to a close, Lucas unveils an acoustic version of The Christmas Song. It blends country, Christmas and 70s soft rock like honey melting into hot chocolate - and when Lucas sings although its been said many times, many ways/Merry Christmas to you, it feels brand new and a genuine wish from the heart all over again. It must have been tempting to put this as the last song on the album, a memorable denouement to close out the album - but (correctly, as it turns out) that honour goes to Baby's Got A Present. This effervescent, bubbling jam captures all the excitement of waiting for Christmas day to arrive, ensuring the listener feels every moment of anticipation that Lucas does as he waits to see what lies under his Christmas tree on the big day. It is fitting that playful piano, flirtatious percussion and giddy guitar are as central as Lucas' vocal one last time - they have been equal MVPs across this brilliantly produced and performed set of work. Makes you want to rush back to the beginning and start all over again. Why? Because Christmas is Here and I can't wait for it to happen as often as possible. ---My Festive Pop, amazon.com

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