Jethro Tull – Christmas Album (2003)

1. Birthday Card at Christmas
2. Holly Herald
3. Christmas Song, A
4. Another Christmas Song
5. God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen
6. Jack Frost and the Hooded Crow
7. Last Man at the Party
8. Weathercock
9. Pavane
10. First Snow on Brooklyn
11. Greensleeved play
12. Fire at Midnight play
13. We Five Kings
14. Ring Out Solstice Bells
15. Bouree
16. Winter Snowscape, A - (bonus track)

Personnel:
Ian Anderson (vocals, acoustic guitar, mandolin, flute, piccolo, percussion);
Martin Barre (guitar, acoustic guitar, electric guitar);
Dave Pegg (mandolin);
Gábor Csonka, Péter Szilágyi (violin);
Gyula Benkö (viola);
András Sturcz (cello);
Andy Giddings (accordion, organ, keyboards, keyboard bass);
Doane Perry (drums, percussion);
James Duncan (drums).

For a band that remained relatively consistent (with a few minor exceptions) in their approach to rock & roll since 1968, Jethro Tull also possessed a sound that was uniquely '70s-oriented during their most successful period between 1971-1978. Avid fans have been yearning for the group's return to the style which made them one of the most successful of the guitar-based, mainstream prog outfits -- albums like Broadsword and the Beast and J-Tull.Com touched on their former glory, but they didn't fully satisfy. Christmas Album could be the recording that those fans have been waiting for, and they shouldn't let its title or overt seasonal orientation dissuade them -- with their liberal use of classic English folk music and overall orientation toward England's past (even in their name), Jethro Tull is also the one prog rock/hard rock band of their generation that could issue a Christmas album that folds so easily into the rest of their output; it transcends its purpose and focus, mostly through the quiet boldness of its music and playing and the surprising excitement that laces most of the 16 songs. With a mixture of re-recorded old songs, Christmas standards and new originals, songwriter/singer Ian Anderson, in a roundabout manner, captures the tradition, warmth, and bittersweet feelings that are inextricably linked to the holiday season; at the same time, Anderson, longtime collaborator/lead guitarist Martin Barre, and the rest of the group's 2003 lineup recapture the musical intensity of three decades' past, and build on the classic Tull mood of sardonic humor, wry irony, and fierce passions that permeated all of their work from Stand Up to Songs From the Wood.

All of this material, in its content and execution, recalls the group's prime early-'70s years and levels of musical complexity not presented so successfully by this band in at least 25 years. With a generous use of unamplified instruments like mandolin, acoustic guitar, flute, and accordion, this album resembles the production found on Songs From the Wood and Heavy Horses. In fact, three tracks from those two albums were reworked for this release; "Fire at Midnight," "Ring Out Solstice Bells" and "Weathercock." Only "Ring Out Solstice Bells" appeared to be the obvious choice for a Christmas album, but given Anderson's offbeat perspective of things, the other two tracks assimilate nicely. In addition, "Jack Frost and the Hooded Crow" sounds like it could have emanated from those 1977 and 1978 recordings, as could "Last Man at the Party" from 1974's War Child sessions. Among the re-recordings, pieces such as "A Christmas Song," that originally had orchestral accompaniment, are redone without it, in new arrangements, while others that were done without orchestra get dressed up with strings. From the traditional side of Christmas, Tull gives "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" a jazzy adaptation reminiscent of "Bouree" from Stand Up (which is also revisited on this recording) and "We Five Kings".

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