

D8 THE VANCOUVER SUN, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1998

ENTERTAINMENT

Sprited Carol makes music of Dickens' Christmas story

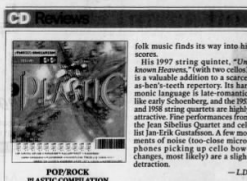
A CHRISTMAS CAROL: THE MUSICAL
At the Westport Theatre, Hill Country
on Oct. 28, 1998. Photo by [unreadable]

PETER BERNIE
with **THEATRE CRITIC**
Turning, turning to hear the pre-recorded band, A Christmas Carol: The Musical opens with enough spirit to make this a fine live-theatre experience for eyes the young of children. Employing a large centre-stage revolve as Scrooge had been visited by the spirits of Le Mal, director Janet Mached has used such theatrical mechanics to help prevent this Carolous Theatre Christmas, now in its 10th year, from growing too mechanical.

The songs are snappy, the mood is upbeat and Ron Halder's Scrooge sings with alacrity as Dickens story of the meanest miser in London can-
ters merrily along. Mayor Moore's script maintains a healthy respect for the original book by retaining healthy chunks of its text, so that Scrooge still suffers those prison and work-houses, but the story also gets a spiritual lift from Moore's simple little ditties.

The show opens with a ruse riddled, naturally enough, Humbug. Halder has a strong singing voice and the right sense of his character's essential naivete, but the cast's full range of vocal levels on the subsequent ensemble singing of Christmas is proven greater care is needed so that young performers Ryan Whymouth (as Tiny Tim) and Haley Jenkins (as a variety of roles) are properly heard.

Ben Elliott and Annabel Kershaw pull off a funny Act 2 as Scrooge's maids singing What Are You Doing About the Importance of Charity in an age of greed, this show's many clever elements seem eternal.



POP/ROCK
PLASTIC COMPLEXION
Various artists

This compilation of techno, dub and hip-hop flavoured music takes the diverse styles of Spiritualized, Sarah McLachlan, Overcast and Coroner, to name a handful, and ensures they've got multiple layers of electronic processing for equal measure.

Among this box of professional all sorts more than a few highlights, Coroner's trippy *Interiors of Aho* is fleshed out and filled into the straightforward with a rhythm that combines the band's traditional Indian sound with a rhythm that's fresh, big and contagious. Spiritualized sometimes wanders like a church organ with elaborate synthesized sounds and lush background vocals at Geiger-counter speed.

Single master Roni Size does an experimental remix of McLachlan's Sweet Surrender, taking his time as he samples McLachlan's vocal and builds a mid-tempo bassline, and cooks a simple soup of strings and keyboards. McLachlan fans beware: the original *Interiors* is more than a little recognizable. The Crystal Method, Devo and William Orbit all contribute extremely dance worthy additions.

FOLK
ELIZO & DANSON
Suzanne Strauss

All dressed up with few places to play. That's the plight of the excellent Vancouver duo of Jesse Zabot, who plays fiddle and mandolin, and Steve Dawson, who plays various instruments.

If you haven't heard these two musicians live, then at all means check out their CD, a program of 11 songs.

Overlooking each duo member usually plays at least two instruments on a song, and occasionally using guest musicians. ZABOT fills the room with sound. For example, My Aromatic had one guitar, Hawaiian guitar, two mandolins, bass, accordion and cymbals to push a melody line with all the propulsion of a locomotive. While both are excellent players, their real craft is in the arranging, knowing how to play together, then feed off one another's face. Dawson plays some very tasty slide guitar on a pair of tunes.

JAZZ
DON BYRON AND EXISTENTIAL DREAM
No Bluegrassation

Composer, clarinetist and singer Don Byron takes a new direction with each recording, and here he samples Frank Miller and Spoken Word Crescent. The funk and hip-hop material all finds a good groove — at different times — and James Brown, Marshall and the Neville Brothers, with their touches above your basic rap. There's a winky take on the Tim Herretic number *It's What Nine*, and *Elgado* is a nice Afro-Cuban groove. The spoken word tracks, however, are self-indulgent, with Byron expounding his ideas on race, the media and his own stature as an artist. He does this in a stilted interview with a dense but overly music journalist. Get off the saxophone, D.B., you're too good a composer to waste your time lecturing.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
REHOTO & RHAPSODY
The Gershwin Years

The 100th anniversary of George Gershwin's birth in September has created a glut of Gershwin CDs. Here are two of the better ones, both composer oriented. *Rhapsody* is a diverse if almost serene like a compilation. One must try to get to St. Louis Blues, the most fun to marvel at the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra's lush interpretation of *Lullaby*, which features lengthy breaks of solo piano from the track. Joel Lurie and Somerstein, and her jazz stylings make Mitchell's voice recognizable from anything she's done in the past. Other artists appearing here include saxophonist Kenny Garrett, Wayne Shorter and James Carter.

Rehoto & Rhapsody is a compilation of Gershwin's folk, world music and occasionally jazz artists, to represent Gershwin. For the most part, the experiment works.

Rogean Ignara Ernest Rauding appears twice, on Finley Quay's African flavoured version of *I Got Plenty of Nuthin'*, where he and the band's Spearhead play it cool and funky with lots of scratch effects. Rauding meets punk lounge on Smoke CD's creative version of *They Got That Thing* *Take That Away From Me*. David Bowie and Angelo Badalamenti do *Subtle for a Foggy Day*, and *Sinbad Over Me*. More conventional jazz arrangements come from Hackett Laws and Natalie Merchant, although even jazz vet Clark Terry gets in a funk groove.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LALINA
Canadian Guitar Trio

The first CD by Vancouver's Canadian Guitar Trio has some of the best recent music you'll find stuffed into an hour of listening time. Zab Wenzel is an all-up rock and roll virtuoso who plays with a raw charm and individual cast for *Blue*. The program is almost all from his repertoire. He plays a Vivaldi concerto for two mandolins. Mozart's *Five All-time* Nachtmusik. Boccherini's *Six* originally intended for guitar, such as by the local Carlos Marchal (whose first cut, *Quebra Quebra* is hampered by his own subtle rhythmic taps on the body of the guitar). The sound quality is full and crystalline clear.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
RAUTENHARAR
STRING QUARTET

Finally receiving his Western due over the last few years is the 70-year-old Finnish composer Erno-Rautavaara. Long overlooked and influenced by Jean Sibelius, Rautavaara, too, is a typical composer whose work has been written but never sat with total ease. Even in his top music his harmonies remained essentially tonal, and commonly the spirit of Finnish.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
NOVA
Jean Sibelius Quartet, Jan-Erik Gustavson, cellist



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