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## CHEERS! IT'S BLAKE SHELTON

**Christmas comes early for Blake as he releases a new album featuring his mom, his wife and a few close pals**

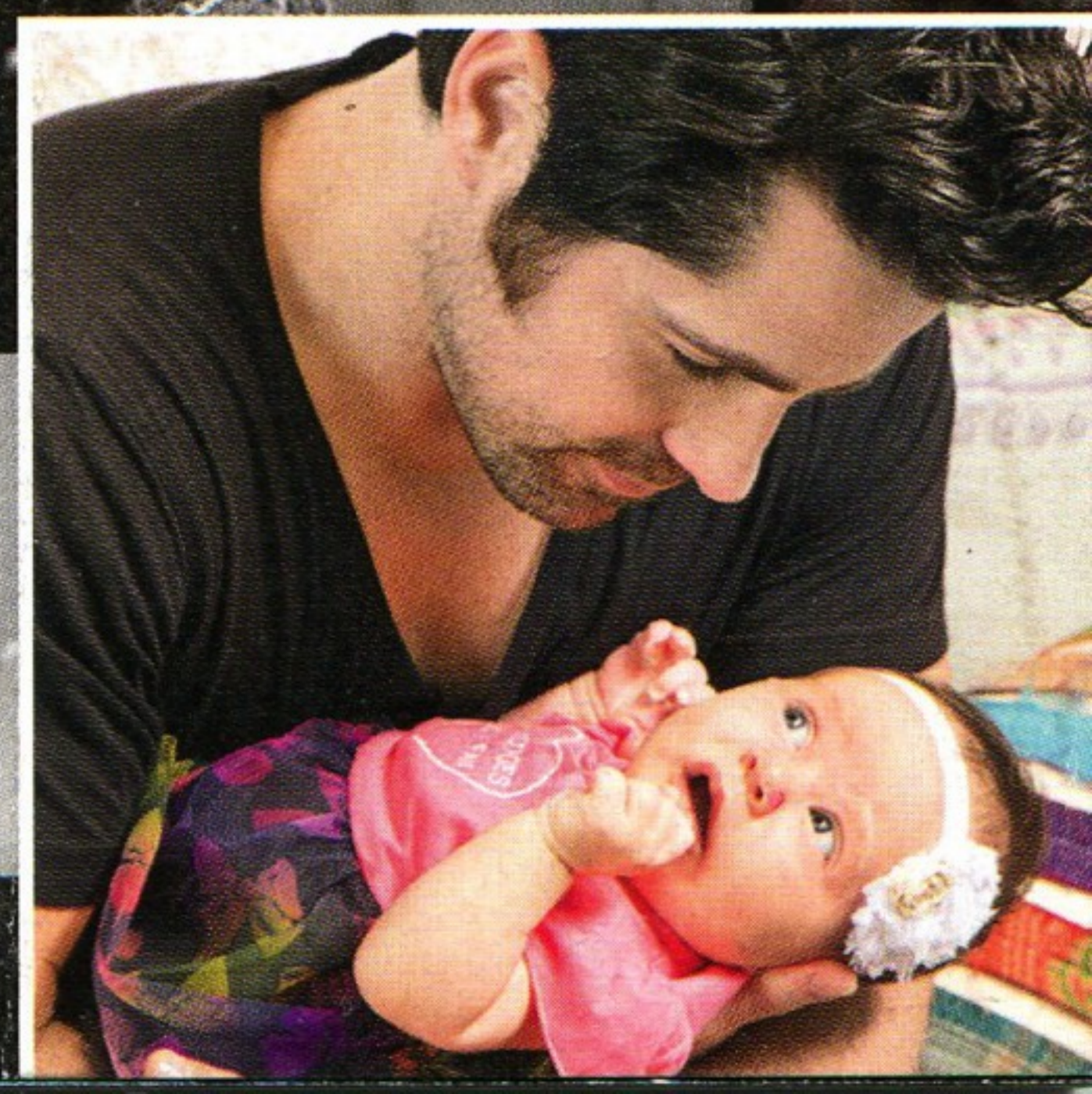
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# IT'S BLAKE SHELTON'S MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

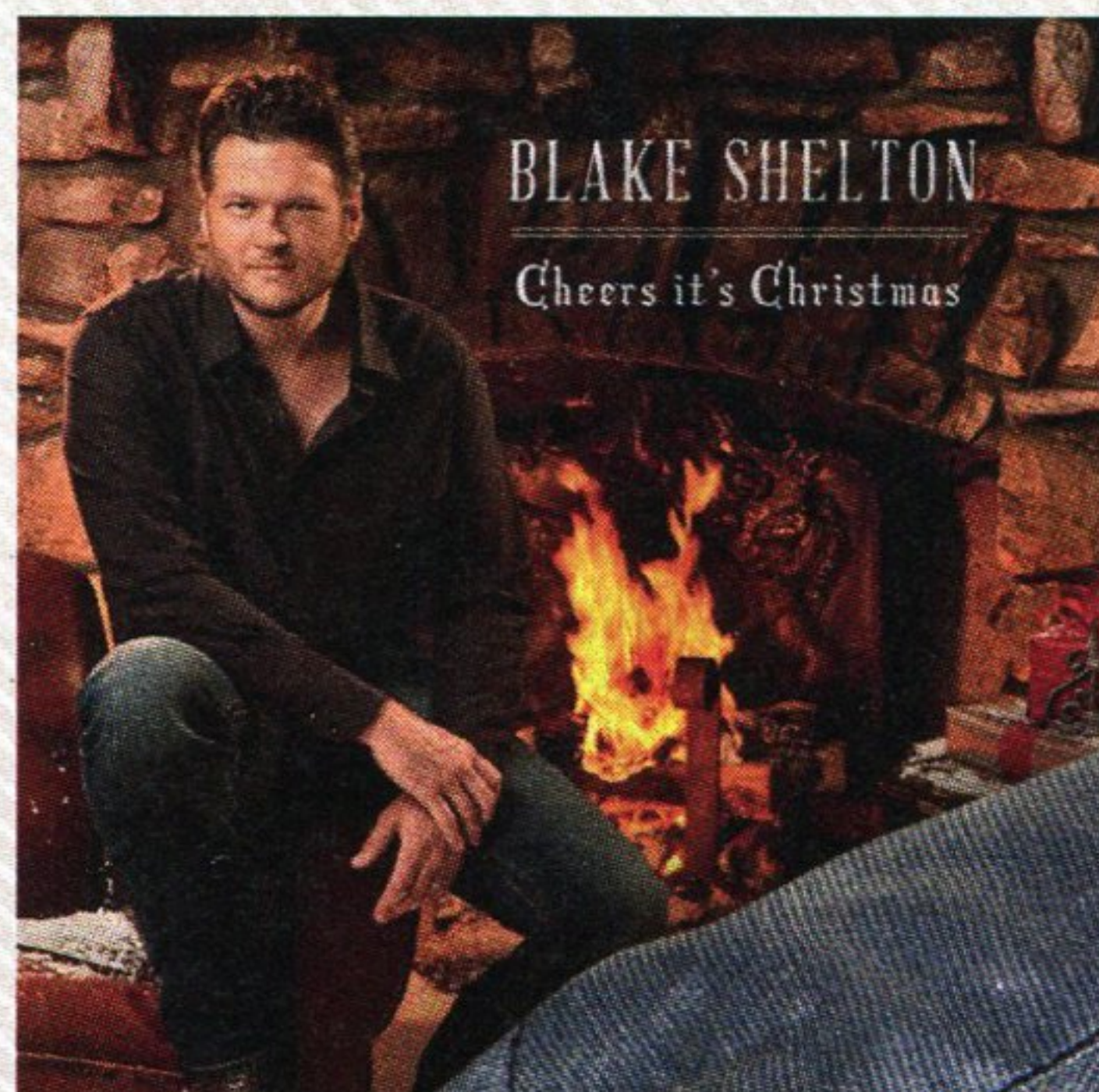
The country star spreads cheer with a new Christmas album and TV special—and reflects on holidays past.

BY JOSEPH HUDAK WITH MELINDA NEWMAN

**IF THERE WERE EVER** a country music staging of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Blake Shelton could play the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future.

Though he may be just one man, the reigning CMA Entertainer of the Year possesses a Sasquatch-size stocking full of Christmas spirit. And not only in December. As his frustrated friends will all admit, Blake infamously subjects them to carols year-round.

"It drives people around me crazy, especially during turkey season. That's when I usually get people the most upset with me, because we always have some friends in down there in Tishomingo," says Blake of spring hunting season on his Oklahoma ranch.



BLAKE SHELTON BY KRISTIN BARLOWE/WEB



## BLAKE SHELTON CONTINUED

"They'll be in the house and we'll be cooking or something, and I'll turn on Anne Murray's *Best of the Season* Christmas album. They look at me like, 'Here we are trying to drink, have a good time, shoot a turkey and you're playing Christmas songs. It's spring, for God's sake!'"

Blake laughs, but is a bit bemused by his pals' reaction.

"That's what I listen to," he says matter-of-factly. "When I'm by myself, you can understand that I'm probably listening to weird stuff—including Christmas music in the summertime."

That said, it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that Blake released his very own holiday album, *Cheers, It's Christmas*, just two days into October. A collection of classic carols and contemporary Yuletide compositions, the record was a true labor of love for Blake, who had his work cut out for him when selecting a final track list.

"We had to approach it like making a well-rounded album. Because if I just did my absolute favorites, we'd have ended up with a bunch of 'The First Noel' and 'Silent Night,'" Blake says. "We needed something fun and up-tempo, and I think we had a good balance with that and a good balance of original material. They all come from a personal place."

And some even feature special guests from Blake's life—like mentor Reba McEntire, mom Dorothy Shackelford and wife Miranda Lambert.

In fact, it's Blake and Miranda who open the album, duetting on "Jingle Bell Rock." But according to Blake, listen closely and you'll also pick out Ran on an updated rendition of "Home," the Michael Bublé tale of road weariness that Blake took to No. 1 in 2008. He and the Canadian crooner trade verses on a seasonally appropriate version of the song on *Cheers, It's Christmas*.

"Miranda was out here in L.A. when we did all that, and Michael



Blake gets musical at 2 years old.

and I both said, 'You know, I like you and all, but I don't know if I like you enough to sing a duet together like 'Home,'" Blake says, laughing. "So there is a female voice and that's Miranda."

Even more awkward to Blake than singing a love song with a man was asking the guy who wrote it to *rewrite* it.

"It wasn't easy to get the nerve to ask Michael Bublé to rewrite 'Home' for me. That was almost an embarrassing e-mail that I had to send him," he says. "But I thought I might as well swing for the fence here. I'll be damned if he didn't do it."

Blake also gets an assist from his own mother, Dorothy, on a song they wrote especially for the project, "Time for Me to Come Home."

"Mom and I sing together on the album, and the fact that

## BLAKE & MIRANDA PLOT THEIR HOLIDAY TOUR



**THIS CHRISTMAS MARKS** the second for Blake and Miranda as a married couple. But, sadly, it also marks the first without Blake's dad, Dick, who passed away in January. Still, Blake stresses that the family's traditions will continue.

"No doubt it'll be sad this Christmas without him around. But the traditions won't change. My family, we're used to having some loss over the years—starting with Richie," he says of his older brother who died in a car accident when Blake was 14.

"When things like that happen, that makes Christmas that much more important," Blake continues. "That's when you appreciate the ones that you do still have left. And the new ones that come along, like my niece and my nephew, and



Blake's family and friends join him on his Christmas special: (clockwise from above left) Blake with mom Dorothy, Michael Bublé, good friend Reba McEntire and *The Voice* co-star Christina Aguilera.



Miranda and her family. It makes you appreciate the ones you have around all that much more when you lose somebody."

As with past Yuletides, Blake and Miranda will embark on what Blake dubs "The Christmas Tour," visiting his in-laws in Texas on Christmas Eve, before returning northward to Oklahoma on Christmas morn' to be with his family.

"We'll head down to Texas and that's normally where we do Christmas Eve and Christmas morning. Then we'll drive back up to Oklahoma and hang out with my mom and my sister, if she hopefully makes it down from Oklahoma City," Blake says. "Everybody is going in different directions to hang out with all the

people they need to. It's a lot like putting together a tour, it really is."

Adds Miranda, "We've been doing it forever that way since we started dating, so it kind of worked out so nobody was mad. We're lucky on that front."

The couple also makes sure they set aside some time just for themselves.

"We have a night before Christmas at some point where we just hang out together and wrap presents," Miranda says. "He actually helps to wrap presents, which is kind of shocking, and he does pretty good. Everyone can usually tell mine and Blake's because they aren't perfectly wrapped and they have bumps and things. But it's really cool for us to listen to Christ-

mas music and wrap gifts."

Blake admits that while he tries his best at wrapping, he's more suited for skinning a deer. "Oh, for sure. That's kind of how I approach wrapping," he jokes.

Shredded paper or not, the important part is that Blake and Miranda are together, alone.

"As a new family, as a new married couple, I think it's important to just have a night, whether it's close to Christmas or on Christmas, where you just have that one moment that's not with your parents," Miranda says. "You start setting that up, so we're trying."

Just don't expect them to be sipping eggnog.

"It looks like vomit," says Blake. "I'd rather drink something clear."

## BLAKE'S EARLY CHRISTMAS GIFT

This Christmas, Blake Shelton knows exactly what gift he's going to give himself. "I'm going to wrap my Entertainer of the Year award trophy and open it like it was the first time I've ever seen it and just stare at it," he says. A few weeks after his surprise CMA Awards win, Blake is still overwhelmed by the honor.

"You're the first person I've talked to about this. After that night, I did some press, but I haven't really talked about it since then. And I can't talk about it enough," he says, eager to clarify some of the state-of-shock comments he made immediately following the win.

"I don't take it lightly. I've read some of the things that I've said, like saying it was dumb that I got it. I don't mean it that way. It means a lot to me, because everything I do I try to represent country. Country music is what I live and die by," says Blake, who, to noncountry fans, has become known as a TV star on *The Voice*, NBC's hit singing competition. "*The Voice* will come and go and a lot of things will come and go, but country music will always be the thing that I center my life and career around. That trophy is a big deal to me. I still can't believe that it happened."



**BLAKE SHELTON CONTINUED** we wrote that song together is a big deal. It's my favorite thing on the album, and it's what the whole album is centered around: that moment," Blake says warmly. "When people hear we wrote a song together, they're going to think it's a really mushy, emotional thing. But it's a happy song. It's a song about how it's not Christmas unless you're with your mama."

Blake's desire to honor his home state is also reflected on the project—he sings the original "Oklahoma Christmas" with fellow Okie Reba. "That song was actually written by a couple of my band members and Trent Willmon. I told them, 'Man, I wish there was a song about Christmas in Oklahoma. There are all these different Christmas songs that represent a lifestyle or a part of the country, and I never had heard

one that was a tribute to Oklahoma at Christmastime.' They heard me say that and got together with Trent and wrote that song with Reba in mind. They knew if there was anybody I could guilt into doing a duet with me it was Reba," Blake jokes. "I'm proud of that one."

A few of the songs on *Cheers, It's Christmas* will also be getting the TV treatment when Blake's very own holiday special, *Blake Shelton's Not So Family Christmas*, premieres Dec. 3 at 10 p.m. ET on NBC.

Featuring many of the album's special guests—including Miranda, Reba and Mom—the *Not So Family Christmas* is heavy on music.

Blake and Miranda partner up on "Home," he and Reba do "Oklahoma Christmas," and mother and son sing their "Time for Me to Come Home."

"We wrote the song together, so that



(Left) Blake's wife, Miranda Lambert, performs "Home" with her hubby during the special. (Below) For the sake of comedy, Blake dresses up like an elf (and couldn't be cuter).



***"WHEN PEOPLE HEAR WE WROTE A SONG TOGETHER, THEY'RE GOING TO THINK IT'S A REALLY MUSHY, EMOTIONAL THING."***

was very exciting," Dorothy says, "and when he asked me to sing it with him, I got really excited. And then when he said he wanted me to do it on the show, I about passed out."

Fortunately, she remained upright and, Blake raves, did a bang-up job.

"She got out there and was the most professional one of us all. She was on time, knew her parts and sang it great. You'd think she was doing this for years," a proud Blake says. "She said she was

nervous, but you damn sure couldn't tell."

Of course, with Blake's keen sense of, some might say, twisted humor, his *Not So Family Christmas* also unwraps a few comedy skits. There's even one with some rowdy elves.

"We did a funny skit with a fake director who was supposed to be making a Christmas video for my album, and I show up and the entire cast is all little people. It just doesn't make any sense to me . . . and we get in a fight," Blake

says coyly. "Without giving away too much, there are elves everywhere, and for no reason."

But fans needn't look far for the reason behind *Cheers, It's Christmas*. For Blake, it was simply the culmination of a holiday dream. And one he reveals he may never repeat.

"Things change, but I don't plan on ever doing another Christmas album," Blake says. "That's why we went all out. From recording with an orchestra here in L.A., and a horn section, and all the Nashville guys, this album has been coast to coast. It was important to me that we didn't skip out on important things to make it easy."

Besides, the Christmas junkie just might not be able to whittle down another batch of chestnuts.

Admits Blake, "I'd have to do a box set to include my favorite Christmas songs of all time!" **CW**