

NOTEWORTHY

- **Eazy Does It** G-Eazy's new album and short film, *The Beautiful & Damned*, arrives Dec. 15.
- **Taylor Made** Taylor Swift will kick off a tour in support of *reputation* on May 8 in Glendale, Ariz.

HANSON

Finally It's Christmas

The last time Hanson released a holiday album—1997's *Snowed In*—they couldn't drink or vote. On their second holiday full-length, the charismatic trio bring a more mature worldview and plenty of cheer, imbuing covers of Stevie Wonder's "Someday at Christmas" and the Eagles' "Please Come Home" with soulful verve. But they shine most on romping originals such as "Til New Years Night" and the title track. **B+**

FANTASIA

Christmas After Midnight

Sure, the *American Idol* winner makes down-tempo classics from "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" to "Silent Night" glisten. But the standouts on her first holiday album are impassioned, upbeat takes on Ray Charles ("The Snow Is Falling") and James Brown ("Santa Claus Go Straight to the Ghetto"). **A-**

HERB ALPERT

The Christmas Wish

Here's one for Grandpa's Christmas stocking. Five decades after his first holiday album, the suave trumpeter returns with an LP that'd fit right in on Don Draper's turntable. Beware the run time, however: At 54 minutes, the schmaltz can wear thin. **B**

98°

Let It Snow

Their harmonies are unimpeachable, but the pop vocalists' second Christmas album lacks any real flair. Most of the bland arrangements are *fine*, though the missteps—a beatboxed "Let It Snow," for instance—are egregious. **C+**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Holidays Rule (Vol. 2)

The eclectic second installment of this compilation series features the likes of Norah Jones, the Decemberists, and Grace Potter, whose original tune "Christmas Moon" is a retro treat. Less so: Paul McCartney's garish rework of "Wonderful Christmastime" with Jimmy Fallon & the Roots. **B-**

SMOKEY ROBINSON

Christmas Everyday

The iconic soul singer's smooth set is as warm and inviting as a fireside mug of hot cocoa. Robinson recruits Trombone Shorty to add his Big Easy wheezes to "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" and teams up with the Dap-Kings on his charming original "You're My Present." Naturally, the crooner's silky pipes unify the project. **A-**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Christmas Soul

Selections on this 25-song Amazon Music playlist—which captures the holiday's essence with a generous serving of soul, R&B, and blues—range from Marc Broussard's Southern-fried cover of Charles Brown's "Please Come Home for Christmas" to "Snow-suit," a dense original from the wordy rapper Open Mike Eagle. **A**

LINDSEY STIRLING

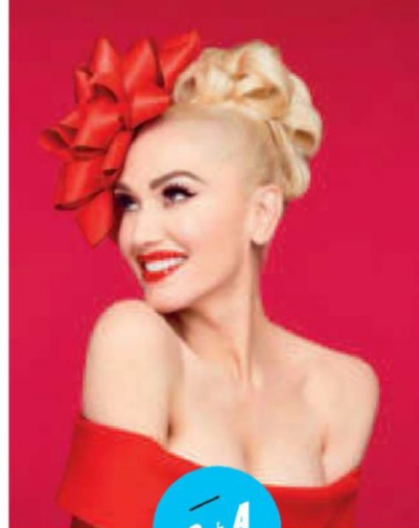
Warmer in the Winter

The Tchaikovsky-meets-dance-pop aesthetic of opener "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" is the worst moment on the violin virtuoso's collection, but it defines the set's weakness: Stirling's blaring performances pierce instead of please. **C**

CHEAP TRICK

Christmas Christmas

It's tough for the Rock and Roll Hall of Famers to do wrong, and they deck their Christmas LP with plenty of personality. Part of the appeal is their unique slate of songs: They've got three originals ("Merry Christmas Darlings" is the best) along with covers of holiday deep cuts by Harry Nilsson and glam rockers Wizzard. The energy's so high, you'll want to save this one for after the eggnog and rum. **A-**



GWEN STEFANI SPARKS THE (CHRISTMAS) FIRE

'Tis the season to feel hella good: The No Doubt frontwoman, 48, has a new album, You Make It Feel Like Christmas, out now, and an NBC holiday special airing Dec. 12 at 9 p.m. BY MADISON VAIN

Your third solo LP, *This Is What the Truth Feels Like*, just came out last year. You must have been on a roll creatively.

I didn't think I'd make another record. When I pray, I pray for guidance, and when those little sparks of ideas come out of nowhere, I just have to believe that is what it is. When [this idea] came to me, I texted my managers, and within a week I had a session.

What drew you to a Christmas album?

I love the idea of being part of that joy of Christmas by having a record that will be an annual thing. I really hope we hit on something that people want to hear every year. That would be the fantasy, to be Mariah Carey. Who else has done it? Not a lot of people!

Along with covering classics like "Let It Snow," you co-wrote six original songs. Did they come easy?

I was at [boyfriend] Blake [Shelton]'s ranch in Oklahoma and there are all these animals, like wildebeests! It's just *Jurassic Park*. I decided to go for a run. I was out there thinking to myself, "If I wrote a Christmas song, what would it be?" And literally this whole chorus comes out of my mouth! I was just singing out loud, myself with the wildebeests, this song called "Christmas Eve." [Laughs]

Are you thinking of another solo LP?

I'm not writing at all. [Laughs] I don't ever write until I have to. But last week I was fantasizing about doing a record. I have to be really picky because of time, because of my kids. But I think about it a lot.