



## **Christmas Music 0 to 2013: A Word to the Wise**

By Raul da Gama, World Music Report / December 21, 2013

“ Alexis Cole’s 2009 recording *The Greatest Gift—Songs of the Season* is another one of those spectacular recordings that never seems tired, no matter how many times it is played and listened to. This recording is just as spectacular as David Foster’s, but while Mr. Foster’s recording references several musical idioms, Ms. Cole’s leans completely towards the jazz and rhythm and blues idiom. Borrowing from the African idioms may be completely appropriate, as is seen and heard in the 2011 recording (later) made by Geri Allen. Although this narrows things down a bit, the sophistication of the music—which sometimes includes the Alan Farber nonet—is sometimes so blinding that it leaves the listener quite breathless. The African American Spiritual “Rise Up Shepherd and Follow” is superbly arranged. The inclusion of the Indian tabla and the tanpura, together with the soprano saxophone give the chart a truly ethereal air and make this version unlike anything that has been written and performed by any artist ever since modern recording can be tracked. Doubtless, there will be carols sung in the Indian vernacular that incorporate more ethnic idioms, but one that crosses the borders between Africa, Indian and the Americas would be hard to find. Ms. Cole’s vocal gymnastics throughout this chart are also quite special. Among the other special performances on the recording are those by the saxophonist, Don Braden, violinist Christian Howes, whose unbridled genius lights up each of the charts on which he plays, Alan Farber, who continues to remind listeners what a fine trombonist he is. The band’s choral version of “Silent Night” with spectacular dissonance’s appears late in the album and is well worth waiting for. ”