

The Christmas Wish

Getting some of the greatest Newfoundland artists to perform on one CD seems like an impossible feat, but somehow the producers of *The Christmas Wish* managed to pull it off.

An eclectic lineup of musicians makes this Christmas collection worth more than passing notice: Great Big Sea, The Irish Descendants, The Ennis Sisters, The Celtic Connection, John Philips, The Fables, Wince Coles, Shanneyganock, Tickle Harbour, Pamela Morgan, The Walsh Family and Ray Lake. Even with this enormous amount of talent collected on one CD, the musicianship stands out without overpowering the beautiful lyrics of this Christmas album.

Traditional acts

The Christmas Wish was really six years in the making. Broadcaster Tony Hann noticed there was a lack of Newfoundland Christmas songs and began inquiring with some local traditional acts about recording an album of songs that reflected a Newfoundland Christmas. The response was very positive but the project soon fell by the wayside.

In 1998, Hann proposed the project to Lyle Drake and Robert Buck of Avalon Music Ltd. They liked the idea and eventually the project started to take life.

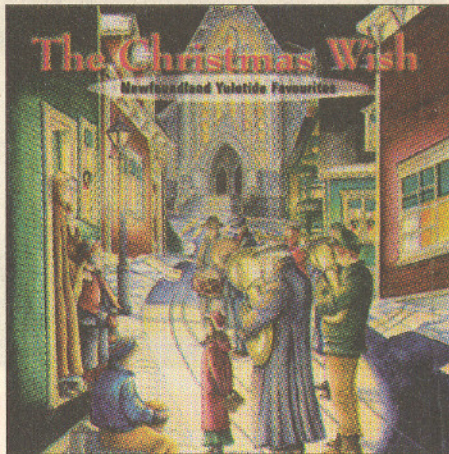
In August 1999, the first of the bands went into Don Walsh's Dadyeen Studios to belt out a Christmas tune. Outside, it was a hot sunny Newfoundland day, but inside the studio it was Christmas.

In their efforts to keep the entire recording true to a Newfoundland Christmas, they endeavored to seek out a Newfoundland artist whose work would tell the story they were looking to tell. Richard Steele was excited about being part of the project and graciously gave two wonderful Christmas prints to use on the project. — Cover: *Yuletide Interlude*

(1997); Inset: *I Still Believe* (1996).

Born in St. John's, Steele grew up in the older section of the city. A teacher, he taught for 27 years and most recently has been teaching art education at Brother Rice High School in St. John's.

The producers chose not to stick with all traditional selections and fortified their project with original songs by Con O'Brien, Wince Coles, Dermot O'Reilly, John Philips and Andrew Smith, Maureen Ennis, Ray



Lake and Greg Walsh.

Heading Home for Christmas was penned by Con O'Brien. It was the first Christmas song ever written or recorded by Juno Award winners, The Irish Descendants. There's no better comfort to a Newfoundlander than knowing he will be spending Christmas time at home, and O'Brien captures that feeling beautifully in this song.

Led by the powerful vocals of Maureen Ennis, and the harmony vocals of Theresa and Karen, the sisters sing a beautiful song, *Mary's Lullaby* that was written by Newfoundland songwriter Wince Coles.

The Celtic Connection revisits the Ryan's Fancy classic *Children's Winter*. The skillful songwriting of Dermot O'Reilly shines through in this song and is reminiscent of lightly falling snow and children playing happily in the crisp Winter air.

John Phillips debut album *Avondale Road* enjoyed great play on Newfoundland country music radio. *This Christmas Count On Me* is an original song from Philips that the 'Synchrude Boys' and everyone who lives away from their beloved 'Rock' will love.

Wince Coles is perhaps one of the best songwriters in Newfoundland and Labrador. He's created such classics as *Poppy* and *Only A Rock* and now he's written another gem, *Let There Be Room*, that's destined to become a Newfoundland Christmas classic. With help from Paul Kinsman, Don Walsh, Boomer Stamp and Byron Pardy, Wince delivers an emotionally powerful tune reminding us to keep Christ in Christmas.

Ennis Road, originally appearing on 1998's *The Ennis Sisters' Christmas On Ennis Road*, showcases the songwriting talents of Maureen Ennis. This song is already a staple on Christmas play lists in Newfoundland.

What Christmas Means To Me was written by Greg Walsh, the youngest son of accomplished accordion player Ray Walsh. Joined by his dad Ray on accordion, and sister Michelle Carew on back up vocals, Greg delivers a tune that defines what Christmas is all about: Family, friends, and having fun.

Capturing the moment

Christmas Memories shows the talent Ray Lake has for capturing a moment in song. Lake is a talented performer and songwriter from St. Lawrence on the Burin Peninsula. The confusion of buying that last minute gift, the Christmas tree and cuddling with your sweetheart are all represented here. With the help of great musicians like Dave Fitzpatrick (The Fables), and Glenn Hiscock (Connemara), he has crafted a wonderful original Yuletide tune.

The Christmas Wish will make a fine gift or worthy addition to the Christmas library. ▲