

Christmas is the Only Time by Wes Lachot

This Christmas is the only time I've ever written a review of one song. It's been a few years since Wes Lachot wrote and recorded 'Christmas Is the Only Time,' which appeared on Christmas Time Again, an assorted mix of tunes by a collection of singers and bands from the southeastern U.S., but it's new to me and will be for a long time.

I loved the melody immediately. It doesn't sound like a Christmas song as it does a mellow rock duet of John Lennon and Brian Wilson with Roger McGuinn on guitar and backing vocals. I thought of the Dan Fogelberg song 'Same Old Lang Syne' not long after hearing it because it expresses a melancholy sentiment lodged within a Holiday theme.

Lachot, a multi-instrumentalist/singer/songwriter, now spends his time as a recording studio designer and builder but was an engineer and producer for years. Steeped into the sounds and musicians of his corner of the country, he came into circles of players such as Mitch Easter, Peter Holsapple, Don Dixon, and others including Chris Stamey, who produced 'Christmas Is the Only Time.'

"He's a great producer," Lachot said of Stamey from his new home in North Carolina. "I think at one point I credited both Chris and myself as the artists because he had so much input, but on the record, he gave the credit to me."

The song was recorded in 1995 but released for the first time in late 2006. Lachot wrote the song as a sarcastic tribute to his ex-wife not long after their separation.

*I'll never know for sure if we were ever meant to be,
I don't know if I miss you or I miss the memory*

So, the line goes.

I was relaxing this past Christmas, listening to my newfound treasure of a Christmas song, and turning my girlfriend on to it when she made the following comment: "That's not a nice thing he's saying about this girl, is it? That's the only time he thinks of her?"

I hadn't noticed the sentiment because I was so taken with the melody, but she posed a great question. I decided to find out for myself and liked the song so much that I had questions for Wes anyway, so I set out to find him. I quickly discovered his studio design website and asked him the same question.

"I had recently split with my first wife, and the song is a nostalgic look back at my life with a woman I met in high school and loved for 17 years. I guess that's why the opening melody sounds so mournful," he said in our initial conversation.

Sad story, I thought to myself, but it must have been therapeutic to put those words and chords down on paper to memorialize the relationship. I'm still struck by how sweet the song is, considering how sad the sentiment is.

Lachot sings lead and backing vocals and plays acoustic guitar and Rickenbacker electric on the track. He is joined by Stamey on the same instruments and vocals, John Howie on drums, Mitch Easter on bass, and Brent Lambert on nylon string guitar. An accomplished group, although they aren't a "group," Easter has a host of credits in addition to producing REM's *Murmur*, Howie sings lead for alt-country band 'Two Dollar Pistols' and Lambert is a mastering engineer.

"Chris Stamey produced the song, and I give a lot of credit to him," Lachot said of Stamey, his friend of many years. "I originally had the second bridge, where it slows down, at the end of the song. He made the change, though, [to put it earlier], and that's how it ended up. Sometimes, when you hear criticism like that, you say Hmm, but it worked, and that's what makes him such a great producer."

Stamey was the founder and lead singer of the dB's, a "jangle pop" band as they were sometimes referred to in reviews, for their ringing electric guitars and slight country sensibility to their sound. Not sure if he cares for the "jangle pop" moniker, but I wonder.

The dB's 'Christmas Time' is the staple song of the *Christmas Time Again* album. The song gained some fame after its initial release in 1986 and has gained growing popularity ever since as a fixture on online Holiday mixes, retail stores, and other locations. With high energy, innocent lyrics, clever and classic melody, jangling guitars, and Beatles-like harmonies, the song is a winner at first listen. It's not a Christmas classic only because of its lack of airplay and availability.

In years to come, perhaps radio consultants, programmers, and the other influential beings who have never taken a call from a listener will put aside a Kenny G or Maria Carey Christmas song for just one rotation and play 'Christmas is the Only Time. Listeners will be rewarded.

Christmas Time Again is available on Amazon.com, other major online retailers, and on download at select sites. Lachot has never released a song or an album as a solo artist but knows what it's like to have fans and admirers.

"From time to time, people find me on the phone, or they email me telling me how much they like the song," he said. "Peter Holsapple told me it's his favorite Christmas song."

Lachot is extremely busy with the increasing demand for his studio design skills and building a much bigger name for himself than as a studio musician, engineer, and

producer, which was considerable. It could be said, I suppose that you can take the musician away from the studio, but you can't take the studio away from the musician.

He recently got back together with some of the musicians for live dates and enjoys his rare time as a player. He's a graduate of the Berklee College of Music in Boston and is primarily a keyboardist and a sought-after player of the Hammond B-3 organ. He has also played countless sessions on guitar, bass, vocals, and whatever other instruments you can find in a recording studio.

"I haven't let go of the music," he said, despite the demands for more than a handful of new studios each year from Wes Lachot Design. "I never seem to forget it, and it's a little more fun for me ever since I got back into it."

As for Lachot's 'Christmas Is the Only Time,' I can only hope it gets more exposure on radio and beyond. Those who haven't heard the song are missing something special. Many people like myself keep looking for new Christmas gems each year, and this year I found one. I hope you do too.