



New York-based jazz vocalist [Kelley Sattenfield](#) takes a chance on a childhood holiday classic with her new single, “Blue Christmas.”

Photo courtesy of Kelley Sattenfield, used with permission

New York-based jazz vocalist [Kelley Sattenfield](#) continues her intimate soundtrack with a personalized, harmonic-leaning, bluesy cover of Elvis Presley’s “Blue Christmas” — released Dec. 1 as her first holiday single on [iTunes](#), [Amazon](#), [CD Baby](#), and [Google Play](#).

Sattenfield’s guitarist [Tosh Sheridan](#) provides a solid, Memphis, twangy style underneath, and even joined her for a surprising, harmonic vocal reverb twist at the end.

Covering beloved Christmas classics is always a tricky endeavor. The artist faces the challenge of covering it differently without corrupting the sanctity of the original.

The challenge increases when an artist chooses to surround herself with a spare accompaniment. An intimate spotlight, even for the most genuine of artists like Sattenfield, can be brutal; there’s nowhere to hide, every vulnerability is out there.

Sattenfield has plenty of experience walking that tightrope. Her Sept. 30, 2014 album, *Among The Stars*, with guitarist Tony Romano featured intimate vocals on familiar and special covers she translated as dear to her heart.

In many aspects, she does the same on this holiday single, angling intentionally toward the harmonic, darker, and almost bereft side of the familiar melody. When she doesn’t force the lyrics beyond the leisurely, thoughtful speed of the loping, lazy guitar pace, and lets her throaty, shadowy voice simply fall in the right places, Sattenfield is without peer.

Still, her idea of “Blue Christmas” has a place in the listener’s heart this time of year, especially those without family and friends to call their own. She does hit the right tinges of longing, sometimes blending in with the

tangy twang of Sheridan's electronic/acoustic guitar tones — even if at times she tries to do too much vocally than necessary.

Spare and intimate insist that less is more.

Earlier today, Sattenfield delved a bit more behind the scenes of this special little holiday single, and the next album for AXS exclusively.

AXS: Why “Blue Christmas,” and why just a single?

Kelley Sattenfield: This is one of my favorite holiday songs of all time. Growing up in the South, the one record that played non-stop in our house, was *Elvis' Christmas Album*. His classic, albeit over-the-top version of “Blue Christmas” was the first track, and has been permanently etched in my holiday memories. We wore that record out, and had to replace it at least two times.

I chose to record it, because it seemed like a fun and timely project, and I thought I could bring a little to it with my own rendition. This is my first single release, and I opted for a single (digital format only) to see how it would be received. It was also much easier (and faster) to release a single than an entire album.

I have a third, full-length, album in the works, and this was a good way to put something out there in the interim. And hopefully, it will be enjoyed perennially by new audiences around the world.

AXS: Is that [Tony Romano](#) accompanying you on guitar?

KS: No, that is [Tosh Sheridan](#), another longtime collaborator. Based on my input, he came up with the arrangement, recorded and mixed it, played two guitars (acoustic and electric), and sang the surprise vocal harmony at the end!

AXS: What were you trying to go for vocally with this particular cover, and did you feel you succeeded?

KS: For this cover, I was going for sort of an antidote of the Elvis version. There are so many great renditions out there; however, many are delivered as uptempo "happy" versions, when it's clearly a sad song, according to the lyrics. Also, voice and guitar duo format can be stark and intimate (as you know [*smiles*]) and that helped inform our delivery. From that perspective, I think we succeeded.

AXS: It's a fine line between feeling the music and rendering the notes. What was particularly wonderful and challenging about covering this song? It seems to invite all sorts of arrangements.

KS: I knew from the start I wanted to go for a country-bluesy feel, keeping the music a bit retro in sound, but with a contemporary vocal style. This is a bit out of my typical jazz-influenced zone, and probably lands mostly in the pop genre, which is a first for me.

I also knew that I wanted to re-harmonize the chords at the end, because I was "hearing" an altered melody, that could lend itself to the inclusion of a harmony line at the end.

I recall when we recorded it, we were up against some deadlines, and I literally had to run out of the studio to catch a train to D.C. that day. The harmony line was not recorded, and that seemed to be the end of it. When I received the final mix from Tosh, to my surprise, he had recorded himself singing the harmony line, and it sounded amazing. In my opinion, it totally completes the song. There's something to be said for taking chances, and going where the music takes you.

**Kelley Sattenfield**

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