

[LARRY KERCHNER](#)["HANUKKAH SHMANUKKAH"](#)

Songwriter Larry Kerchner, who usually leaves the singing to others, has recorded one of his own comedy songs. "Hanukkah Shmanukkah" is a cheeky bit of kvetching from a sassy, eye-rolling 13-year-old who has had enough of the holiday, the traditional foods, the family reunions, etc. In the rollicking number, he makes fun of it all, hoping the folks will foist the rugelach onto someone else, as quite not fed up with what he's been fed is this not-so-nice Jewish boy, hoping "some other goy" (non-Jew) will take the unwanted pastries. ("Goy" rhymes with—you guessed it—"Oy!"). Kerchner bounces through the guy's gripes, suggesting the personality of a kid immaturely suggesting that the kibitzing camera-clicking relatives eager to preserve a family Hanukkah celebration in photos get a "good shot of my

butt." With simple accompaniment, the writer-performer brings his own easy, low-key smugness and recognizable Jewish touchstones and characterizations the way comic singer-parody lyricist Alan Sherman did with comedy record fame in the 1960s. Those looking for some laughs while celebrating this holiday should find some smiles in the songwriter's own audience-friendly rendition. The eight-day Festival of Lights this year comes along when Christmas does, so their songs will overlap, too. And as Mr. Kerchner's lyric observes, lots of the Christmas songs were written by Jews.

[OLIVER RICHMAN](#)["CELEBRATE ME HOME"](#)

With its first line being "Home for the holidays," the 40-year-old Kenny Loggins/ Bob James song "Celebrate Me Home" became one more pop item to join the ranks of those pieces that qualify as seasonal fare by accident or design. While much younger than this composition that titled Loggins's debut solo album, West Coaster Oliver Richman brings a definite old soul's understanding and grasp to his very emotive version, as he has to other work. He is 16 years old.

Oliver has a particularly arresting kind of voice quality that is instantly as memorable as it is gripping. An unabashed, brave, bone-honest and deep well of feeling bubbles forth from this talented teen that commands attention. His heart is on his sleeve and beats strongly. The sound can be both mournful and beautiful. It's rare. Listen to how the note and delivery on the word "please" just before the first utterance of the song's title floats so impactfully through the still air. The vulnerability and visceral aspects are highly dramatic. Both sorrowful and cathartic, the performance ebbs and flows, swelling as the music does on repeats of the title. The seemingly guileless guy is a natural. But he's no babe in the woods, having recorded in audio and video, including: a knockout performance of *Wicked's* "Defying Gravity" that went viral on Youtube; an EP of songs written or co-written by his grandfather, Ron Miller, whose hits included work made most famous by Stevie Wonder, like the classic "For Once in My Life" and the seasonal "Someday at Christmas"; and a duet with his talented mother, Lisa Dawn Miller. His dad is a musician, too, and his stepfather, Sandy Hackett, son of the late Buddy Hackett, does a Rat Pack show in which Oliver had played Frank Sinatra as a kid. A smartly produced track, it's quite engaging from beginning to the very end, with a slow, moody fade-out that is as musical as anything else on this or his other recordings (meaning very musical). And there's originality in the rendition that doesn't sound overly directed or forced. This version of "Celebrate Me Home" and its interpreter, like Christmas, bring reasons to celebrate.

[KELLEY SUTTENFIELD](#)[with TOSH SHERIDAN \(GUITAR\)](#)["BLUE CHRISTMAS"](#)

Jealously referencing the Irving Berlin classic, the downbeat lyric of "Blue Christmas" bristles, "You'll be doing all right/ With your Christmas of white/ But I'll have a blue, blue Christmas." Ah, the self-pity that we all hope the holidays won't bring, those yuletide-time blues are nevertheless familiar to many "when those blue mem'ries, start hurtin'." Despite other recordings over the years, it's difficult to get the famous Elvis Presley record out of

my head because it rears its head every year at this time. Finally, someone has conquered it and remade it, devoid of any cheese factor and with no bitter aftertaste. The singer is Kelley Sattenfield, a fairly recent addition to my radar screen whose album *Among the Stars* was on my annual Top Ten list of vocal albums in 2014. Like that album, this single presents the vocalist with just a guitarist—Tosh Sheridan, who is a true partner in setting the tone and mood. He is deft, but no show-off at the expense of the goal: keeping it real. Their more nuanced cover is a major factor in making it more raw in its emotion. The more subtle Sattenfield approach doesn't flee from the "blue heartache," but it doesn't play up the "Woe is me" quotient which is so blatantly just there in the lyric. Simple and even naive in its construction, musically and lyrically, it would be folly to try to make it sophisticated. It has some elements of an old-school country-western song, plain language and plain old pain laid out on the table. Owning that genre, Kelley Sattenfield has a minor field day grabbing onto it and, with the wise Sheridan, bringing out its assets as a plaintive admission of sorrow. There's affection for this oldie about a rejected lover pining away and that becomes contagious, charming the open-minded listener with a similar bent. And the talent, like bright or flashing blue lights on a Christmas pine, does shine through.

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