

Michael Kollwitz  
Santa Plays the Stick



**Michael Kollwitz**, a veteran of more than two dozen recordings, releases a traditional Christmas album called **Santa Plays the Stick**. Kollwitz plays the Chapman Stick, a device that looks like a long, fat electric guitar without a body. By tapping on the strings, it issues a unique electronic sound that reproduces chords and note simultaneously. Kollwitz' music is fifteen tracks of traditional Christmas fare without jingled bells and with some very merry tones. It is light, cheerful, and there's even some jolly in it.

With a tiny echo of synthesizer, Michael starts out with **Away in the Manger**. A warm, cozy piece of traditional comfort. Nothing better than when Michael takes a melody and goes off on a musical tangent as he does in this one. The next song is a Kollwitz original called **A Pile of Presents**. You can imagine the snow from the night before piled up outside the door, the tree decorated with care and love, and those gifts for all. The next track is one of my favorites. **I Saw Three Ships** is based on a 17<sup>th</sup> century English carol. Could they be three silver boats from Bohemia or three desert ships known as camels conveying worshippers to pay respect to the birth of Jesus Christ?

**Snow Ride**, another one of Michael's own tunes, is happy and uplifting. The snow swirls all around, but the trek through the woods is a contrast of green pines and white drifts. It is a happy time for one and all. My absolute favorite on *Santa Plays the Stick* is his original tune called **December Wedding**. For me, the music represents "winter music" in where the artist transforms the beauty and quiet of winter into a marvelous, joyful tune. Kollwitz has done this and I hope he considers many more of these. And yes, any couple would be proud and pleased to walk down the aisle to this tune wintery tune.

**We Three Kings** is a sedate, but respectful song with just a tiny bit of swing in the tempo, but it comes out like a medieval piece for some reason. The familiar refrain, "*Oh, star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,*" reminds us of many things greater than ourselves. We need only believe. The final tune on the album is appropriately **Silent Night**. Kollwitz' intro has an almost Hawaiian slack key guitar intro and I liked it for that. There is no doubting the beauty and reverence of the rendition. All an all, a good album for wrapping the presents and building new Christmas memories. – R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews