

MUSIC

WITH
SALLY
BROWNE



PLAYLIST

ROCK

ROCKWIZ: CHRISTMAS ALBUM

Various artists



Even pop stars enjoy a good Christmas (as our feature story shows), and although Christmas songs can seem a little corny, especially when you're hearing them for the 100th time as you lap your local shopping centre, with the right touch they can be more cream than cheese. There's something warm and fuzzy about spending Christmas with your Rockwiz mates - and a whole lot of talented musicians. The album kicks off with a catchy Christmas medley from The Wolfgramm Sisters, Jade Macrae and Joe Camilleri (how many different songs can you count?) then travels

into the grown-up carol, *Fairytale of New York*, performed by Tex Perkins and Clare Bowditch, and *River* with Tim Freedman and Angie Hart. The boppy ska song *Christmas Wrapping*, performed here by Chelsea Wheatley and The Wolfgramm Sisters, has got to be one of the catchiest Christmas songs around. And Paul Kelly's *How to Make Gravy* is served up a treat with his own nephew Dan Kelly and Ashley Naylor helping him out. With loads more cool Yule songs to unwrap, there's plenty here to make you say "Christmas rocks!" and not "Bah humbug!". **Sally Browne**

CLASSICAL

A BRANDENBURG CHRISTMAS

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and Choir



A program of Christmas music that might constitute a typical Carols by Candlelight evening this is not. And, clearly, that is what Australian Brandenburg Orchestra artistic director, conductor and harpsichordist Paul Dyer sought for the in-concert recording in Sydney a year ago. Three compositions - *The Little Drummer Boy*, *Stille Nacht* (*Silent Night*, sung a capella and

in German) and *O Come, All Ye Faithful* - are essentials for any Christmas choral performance, but few of the other 13 will be familiar. This obscurity is a real bonus, as is the music's pitch-perfect execution, with and without instrumental backing, by soprano soloist Louise Prickett and the 25-member Brandenburg Choir. **Bob Crimeen**

POP

A VERY SHE & HIM CHRISTMAS

She & Him



Actor Zoey Deschanel may play a singing department store elf in the Christmas movie *Elf*, but it's her quiet success as one half of the folk-pop duo She & Him that has brought attention to her natural abilities as a vocalist - and her not-so-secret love of all things Christmas. On their Christmas album, She & Him cover more traditional carols, reminiscent of classic crooners. *The Christmas Waltz* is introduced with the sugar-coated vocals of

Deschanel bringing a yuletide lounge appeal to an old-timer. *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* will make you forget the Cliff Richard version. The Him part of the equation isn't forgotten - the other half of the duo, M. Ward, joins Deschanel for one of a few brief appearances vocally on their folk/rockabilly rendition of *Christmas Wish*. A true masterpiece that recalls Christmas carols the way they should be. **Jennifer Holmes**



FLAME IN A WICKED ACT

Ana Matronic is full of creative flair, writes **Sally Browne** of the quirky 'villain' whose acclaimed Scissor Sisters 'gang' will be among the bright lights playing Summertime in the new year

She's a pop diva with millions of fans worldwide, a statuesque redhead with a distinctive robotic arm tattoo, illustrating her "anamatronic" persona.

With Scissor Sister siblings Jake Shears, Babydaddy and Del Marquis, she has shared the stage with the likes of Kylie Minogue and Elton John and been named by Bono as part of the best pop group in the world (after U2, of course).

Ana Matronic, as her fans know her (or Ana Lynch to her family) is an icon to many.

But the 37-year-old says that in her home neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York, she's just the slightly eccentric girl next door.

"It's always really surprising because I have a very normal life here in New York," Matronic says of her icon status.

"I live in Brooklyn and nobody here in my neighbourhood knows really what I do or is familiar with the band, so I don't really live a lifestyle that you would necessarily expect a, quote-unquote, icon or rock star to live.

"And I really enjoy having a normal lifestyle. I take the train to the studio and make my own dinner and shop at the grocery store.

"So it's something that's always surprising for me, but it's also very exciting. I hope I always look the part!"

On this day, Matronic has just returned home from the studio, where she spent the day with Babydaddy, laying down some new tunes.

"It's going great," she says of the new album. "We're actually wrapping work on it and are

really close to being finished. We'll be delving into some musical territory that has been heretofore unexplored.

"I think there'll be some surprising collaborations on the record, but in addition to that there'll be the nice warm fuzzy Scissor Sisters moments you've come to love from us."

And those moments are plenty on records *Scissor Sisters* (2004), *Ta-Dah* (2006) and their latest, *Night Work* (2010).

Naturally, with so many distinctive personas, the Scissor Sisters are a great fun band to be part of - a bit like being in a gang.

"Yeah, a gang would be a good analogy," muses Matronic, "or perhaps a mafia family would be more appropriate.

"Jake would definitely be our don. It's different for different bands, but ours is definitely not a democracy, even though our dictators are benevolent," she adds with a hearty chuckle.

"Jake pretty much runs our show; I'm not saying that in a bad way. It can sometimes be like a gang. I mean Scissor Sisters, when I first heard the band name I thought it sounded like a girl gang from the '50s anyway."

So how would she describe each member of the band?

"Jake is definitely the charismatic leader, a golden boy with a touch of the dark side. Babydaddy is the rock and brains of the operation. Del is the mercurial wit who never really reveals whose side he's going to play on, and then I'm the villain."

She laughs heartily again. "I have the villain laugh anyway."

The band, which formed 10 years ago from New York's vibrant gay nightclub scene, have a big year ahead of them, including performing at the 2012 London Olympics.

But before all that, they'll be kicking off the year with a tour of Australia, including the Pyramid Rock Festival on Phillip Island, Victoria, on New Year's Eve and the raging Summafieldayze festival at the Gold Coast on January 2, alongside Snoop Dogg, Moby, Calvin Harris and Grandmaster Flash.

It will be a very different New Year's celebration for Ana Matronic than last year, when she enjoyed a quiet New Year's in her New York apartment with her husband and a few friends.

The singer and her long-term partner, artist Seth Kirby, decided to tie the knot just last year. They took their vows in a quiet civil ceremony in New York.

"We sort of woke up one day and decided to get married and six days later we did," she says. "It wasn't really a huge life-changing thing other than we added that next layer to our relationship. We kind of did it in a way that it was about us and it remains that way, which is really nice. I recommend it. Just find the perfect person to do it with."

Naturally, Ana Matronic, who has many friends, fans and followers in the gay community, and whose own father was homosexual, is a big supporter of gay marriage. "I'm so proud to be a New Yorker, where marriage equality has been realised! Who wants Minister Matronic to officiate their gay wedding?" she tweeted when the state of New York passed its gay marriage bill earlier this year.

"Obviously, I believe everyone should have the right to be married and have the protection under the law," she says now.

"It's as simple as wanting to make the person you love your family. I think that's a very basic right. So if only people could see it's an issue about love and commitment and not about any of the scary things they might think it's about because they don't have exposure to gay couples or anything like that. We have it in New York State now, which is great. But we still have a really long way to go. It's still illegal in many parts of the world to even be gay."

Before she and her on-stage family, the Scissor Sisters, head to Australia, Matronic

I learned how to do all the really old, psychedelic methods of making light which is what you would see behind bands like Jefferson Airplane. It's really, really beautiful

has plenty of things keeping her busy. Outside of the music biz, her other creative pursuits include writing a comic book – a thriller-horror themed tale – that she has been working on over the past two years, and helping to create electronic light shows with artistic group the Joshua Light Show.

"The Joshua Light Show was the very first psychedelic light show at the (New York music venue) Fillmore East back in the '60s and they did lights for The Who and Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Woodstock," Ana Matronic says.

"My husband's been a part of it for six

years and I joined a couple of years ago.

I learned how to do all the really old, psychedelic methods of making light, which is what you would see behind bands like Jefferson Airplane. It's hard to describe, but it's really, really beautiful... the things that look like exploding amoebas behind people and rainbows moving, Georgia O'Keeffe paintings come to life.

"I'm getting ready to go down to Miami for a big art fair and we're going to do lights down there, so that's something that I do in my spare time."

The comic [book] has also been a fun creative outlet. "I had to do a lot of research," she says. "But I'm getting it all together and getting it into a place where I can start writing and it's going really well."

"So hopefully that will be finished in the next year."

So, with all these creative plans and projects, does she have any resolutions for the New Year?

"This next year is all about organisation for me," she says firmly.

"My filing cabinet's going to be fierce."

Scissor Sisters play Summafieldayze, Doug Jennings Park, Gold Coast, on January, 2.



Distinctive personas make the Scissor Sisters (left, and above in concert) a fun band. Surprising collaborations are tipped for their new album, as well as 'nice warm fuzzy moments'.

GIG GUIDE

THE CHURCH

Brisbane Powerhouse, December 23-24. Head to The Church Christmas Eve for the band's 30th anniversary tour. \$55. brisbanepowerhouse.org or 3358 8600.

WOODFORD FOLK FESTIVAL

Woodford, Sunshine Coast hinterland, December 27-January 1. Incorporating The Dreaming Festival. Acts include Buffy Sainte-Marie, Gotye, The Herd and more. \$68-\$444 (season ticket with camping). woodfordfolkfestival.com or 5496 1066.

NO YEARS FESTIVAL

Brisbane Powerhouse, December 31. Featuring The Holidays, The Dum Dum Girls, Ball Park Music and more. brisbanepowerhouse.org or 3358 8600.

WHITSUNDAZE FESTIVAL

Magnums Hotel, Airlie Beach, January 1. Featuring 18 acts over 15 hours on three stages. \$25. moshtix.com.au or 1300 438 849.

ALOE BLACC

The Tivoli, January 3. Coming to Brisbane for a soul-stopping show. \$73.30. ticketek.com.au or 132 849.

GUTTERMOUTH

Woodlands, Brisbane, January 27; Billies Beach House, Gold Coast, January 28; Kings Beach Tavern, Caloundra, January 29; Magnums, Airlie Beach, February 2; The Venue, Townsville, February 3. California punk rockers take on the east coast of Australia.

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