



# BACKBEAT ONLINE

## Beyond Playlist presents Xmas-rated, part six: Surprise Packages

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This year, we've wrapped our roundup of holiday albums a bit differently. Instead of delivering it to you in one big lump (like coal), we're parceling out the reviews online, with a blog each weekday through December 24 devoted to recordings in a different category. This year's last installment unwraps "Surprise Packages" -- a slew of oddities that don't fit snugly in other categories. After the jump, check out albums by Jim Jones & Skull Gang; Straight No Chaser; various singing groups associated with Princeton University; Peas, featuring Rachel Leslie; and a pair of Chanukah/Hanukkah tie-ins with different ideas about how to spell the holiday in question. To the dictionary!



**Straight No Chaser's Holiday Spirits** (Atlantic) is the left-field hit of the holiday season: an a cappella offering from former members of an Indiana University singing group that wound up with a major-label deal after a version of "The 12 Days of Christmas" became a YouTube sensation.



However, the fact that this tune cross-pollinates the holiday staple in its title with (oh, my God, no!) Toto's "Africa" should give anyone with an allergy to über-shlock pause. I'm sure that when these guys were little, they were No Chasers. Instead, they were the Chased.

A *Princeton Christmas 2008*, which can be obtained online at [PrincetonChristmas.org](http://PrincetonChristmas.org), is a much more traditional choral effort, and a solid one. The disc features assorted Princeton area singing groups, ranging from the Princeton Day School Madrigal Singers ("Children, Go Where I Send Thee") to the Princeton University Tigerlillies ("On This Day, Earth Shall Sing"). It should appeal to the reverent members of your clan -- and as a bonus, all proceeds benefit the UN World Food Program. That way, purchasers will be helping people in Africa, not the group that sang "Africa."



"Reverence" isn't the word for **Mama Doni's I Love Chanukah!**, an EP aimed at children whose faith doesn't really make a big deal out of that whole Santa thing (find it at [MamaDoni.com](http://MamaDoni.com)). Seven-year-olds will likely enjoy these novelty ditties, exemplified by a rap satire dubbed "The Funky Gold Menorah" and a modified samba with a Ricky Martin twist titled "La Vida Dreidel," while parents will want to keep their distance if they value their sanity. Oy vey.



*Erran Baron Cohen Presents...Songs in the Key of Hanukkah* (New Line Records) isn't



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