

# When the World Falls in Love

**Nathan Avakian, Organist  
Claire Avakian, Vocalist**

Out just in time for Christmas 2024, (or perhaps a head-start on Christmas 2025) Avakian siblings Nathan and Claire present a 12-track album of eclectic seasonal songs. To this reviewer, using the term 'songs' relates more to vocalists than organists.

From that point of view, *When the World Falls in Love*, with eight of its twelve tracks showcasing Ms Claire Avakian's Broadway Musical voice, this album could be placed in the vocal category. Ms Avakian's tracks are "The Christmas Waltz," "The Man with the Bag," "Once Upon a December," "Purple Snowflakes," "White Christmas," "Merry Christmas, Darling," "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch," and "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

This reviewer professes to have some knowledge of theatre pipe organs but is like a 'fish out of water' or a 'deer in the headlights of an on-coming car' when it comes to vocalists. Desiring avoidance of becoming a bloviating old fool and losing face discussing vocalists, this reviewer will now keep the lower half shut...other than to say, right or wrong this reviewer considers the Avakians' collaborative work in a similar vein as the 1970's brother-sister pop group, The Carpenters or current pop group Billie Eilish and brother Finneas.

Accompanying her is brother Nathan, his charts made more interesting utilizing the vast resources of the world-renowned Sanfillipo "Place de la Musique" theatre pipe organ. But beyond that, Mr Avakian is a strong proponent of digitally sampled instruments and freely incorporates them in his arrangements.

This a good thing for us older folks wanting to perpetuate the theatre organ. Attracting and keeping the interest of young musicians is paramount. Proof is the popularity of the ATOS Summer Youth Adventure, and Young Theatre Organist Competition. It must be shown that theatre organs can be a relevant and willing partner in modern music performance by taking advantage of the digital sampling world and Mr. Avakian is leading the way.

However, there are some criticisms to be addressed. Chief among them is the lack of homogeneity in wind blown pipe organs and digitally sampled orchestral instruments. This raises the question, why do digitally sampled instruments, particular drums and cymbals and other percussions, always stand out from the organ? The obvious is they are too loud, and obvious answer, turn down their volume. But that in itself does not solve the problem.

Orchestral instruments are usually sampled with a single cardioid microphone or two microphones in XY configuration in close-proximity to the instrument to be sampled, and in a near anechoic environment. This will yield a dead-dry but accurate sample.

The issue is the *Prima Vocé* instrument (the organ) is speaking into a space of much greater volume with its own noticeable acoustic properties. This reviewer postulates when mixing organ and sampled instruments electronically, our ear-brain sonically favors the sampled because of their higher crest level.

Crest level comes from electrical engineering and sine waves. Loosely applied to musical instruments simply means the transient

(attack) portion of the instrument's voice occurs the moment it is struck, plucked, or bowed in the case of string instruments. It is immediately perceived louder by the ear-brain even though its duration is minimal—milliseconds or less. The following sustained portion of the instrument's sound is softer, exposing the instrument's pitch and unique harmonic train identifying it. The greater the difference between loudness of transient and sustained indicates a higher crest level making that difference more noticeable.

The ideal remedy would be placing loudspeakers inside the organ chambers. Digital instruments would then be subjected to the same acoustic conditions as the pipes. Significantly, one of those conditions would force the digital voices' dynamics to follow the pipes' swell shutters. There are at least two pipe organs in this reviewer's home town successfully using this technique. If chamber space is not available, placing loudspeakers as close as possible to the swell shades will still be beneficial.

Now, getting back to *When the World Falls in Love*.

This reviewer does most of his work with headphones because they reveal subtleties better than loudspeakers. Sorry Ms Avakian, the reviewer paid more attention to your brother's arrangements. You began "The Christmas Song" as a ballad accompanied only by solo piano. About half way through you picked up the tempo giving the song a jazz feel and the piano joining in with sampled brushed drum and string bass—no organ. The balance between voice and accompaniment is perfect.

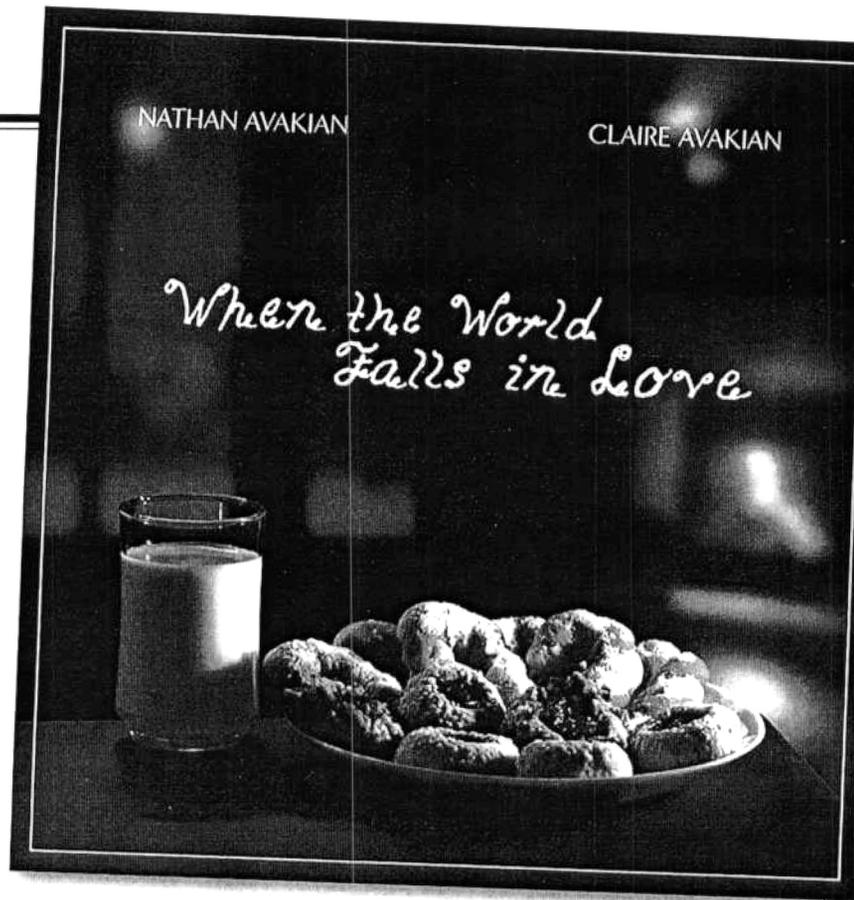
"Once Upon a December" introduces the vocal again with piano, shortly thereafter adding a pair of barely audible organ strings. Building towards a climax, more *pianissimo* organ ranks greet complementary digitals including a drum roll and cymbal crash that maintain their dignity by not overshadowing the ensemble.

Mr Avakian features the organ and his digital buddies with four tracks. A recurring pattern in "Carol of the Bells" and assuming the artist is playing in G minor is this sequence, B-flat, A, B-flat, G, repeated over and over using various voices. Similarly, another repeated interlude uses organ voices, then soloing a digital orchestral flute in the spotlight. It is a successful amalgam.

"Sleigh Ride" carries a single note melody on the piano which could have been sampled but its acoustic signature matches the organ meaning this piano must be in the same acoustic, which must in turn, identifies the Place del la Musique's concert grand piano playable by the organ console.

The remaining two instrumental tracks, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" and "Wizards in Winter" illuminate this reviewer's opinion, how easy it is for digitally sampled instruments to become an annoyance instead of a worthy contributor to the ensemble. Loud drums and cymbals in boisterous high energy pieces would be fine if they sounded like they were in the same acoustic environment as all the other players.

In spite of the comments above, this reviewer cannot fail to mark Mr Avakian's talent and creativity as easily placed in the highest echelons of living theatre organists. Note how he simultaneously



juggles so many balls in "Wizards in Winter." It is a real hoot! And Ms Avakian is destined to reach the status of a musical stage actress/singer/dancer like Ariana DeBose or Idina Menzel.

The playing time 38 minutes, 24 seconds may seem a little short until you understand this album is being released not only as a CD but also streaming and believe it or not, VINYL LP! 38:24 makes a full LP.

Recording quality is superb. Jacket notes and design are outstanding and includes Avakian family recipes for Christmas goodies as a bonus. I cannot quite put my finger on why but *When the World Falls in Love* is just so easy to listen to, I cannot imagine it with anything less than FIVE STARS.

See [www.avakianmusic.com](http://www.avakianmusic.com) for price and ordering details.

—Dennis Hedberg



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