

Bring in holiday cheer with Kelly Clarkson, Pentatonix, more

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Hiss Golden Messenger, “O Come All Ye Faithful” (Merge Records)

It would be hard to find a better fit for Christmas in pandemic times than the new holiday release by Hiss Golden Messenger. It’s wistful but not hopeless, fully cognizant of the difficulties we’ve all been living through, and yet it’s encouraging. In many ways it feels like an extension of the band’s last album, “Quietly Blowing It,” a truly constructive take on the hard times wrought by COVID-19.

“It’s Christmas, baby, thank God we made it,” lead singer and creative force M.C. Taylor sings dolefully on “Hung Fire,” one of several sublimely spiritual new compositions that could find their way into holiday rotation for years to come.

The album’s style is soulful, even majestic, on original Taylor compositions, surprising covers and holiday classics that only gain in stature by being re-worked in the band’s laid-back Americana style.

Ultimately, an excellent band that just keeps getting better is a perfect match for a holiday season that comes upon us in less than perfect times.