

GEORGE HUFF

After years of struggling just to make ends meet, golden-voiced singer George Huff has finally proven that the nice guy doesn't always finish last. Huff captured the hearts of America with his brilliant smile and urban style on season three of Fox's "American Idol," and today, he is enjoying the rewards of stardom and success as he shares his sensational vocal gift with an eager nation-wide audience. In his very first solo outing, Huff lends his silky smooth vocals to classic Christmas standards on a five-song Christmas EP for Word/Curb/Warner Bros. that gives a generous serving of R&B and contemporary gospel flavor.

Last year, Huff was washing dishes and frying omelets in the back room of the cafeteria at the University of Oklahoma in an attempt to pay back his student loans and finish a degree in music. In a matter of weeks, he had swapped out suds for the spotlight on the international stage of "American Idol." Following his initial audition in Houston, Texas, Huff endured eight rounds of tryouts only to be sent back home just short of an appearance in the show's semi-finals. Yet when another contestant became ineligible, Huff got an unexpected callback to become a member of the fourth group of "Idol's" semi-finalist set. Another tough break gave way to good luck when the 22-year-old singer fell short of enough votes to move up to the finals, only to be called back again, this time for "Idol's" wildcard round, and picked as one of the season's top dozen by tough-guy contest judge Simon Cowell.

From that point on, Huff suddenly had devoted fans coming out of the woodwork to rally around the bighearted singer with the velvety voice. He charmed audiences and wowed the contest judges with renditions of classics like "Lean On Me," "Dock of the Bay," "What A Wonderful World" and "Cheek To Cheek," delivering energetic, polished performances week after week and gaining a reputation as "the nicest man in showbiz." Millions of fans around the world voted Huff into the season's top five contestants before he bowed out to fellow "Idol" Jasmine Trias, leaving the stage with a wide, gracious smile and his eyes still set firmly on the bright future ahead.

Now that he's joined his fellow "Idol" stars on a 50-city international arena tour and a best-selling joint album together, Huff is ready to give his fans even more as he begins his solo career. "I got so much love from the fans on the show, and the judges told me that they saw a 'light' in me," he says. "So I simply want to share that light with every audience I can."

Huff developed his desire to inspire others with his music through years of singing in the churches of his hometown in the deep south, New Orleans. Belting out solos and spirituals with the choir from as early as five, Huff's musical involvement with the church influenced his vocal style into adulthood, coloring his delivery and song choices with gospel fervency and R&B flavor.

"I've loved music since I was a kid," shares Huff, whose first performance in his family's church brought the house down, complete with crying, clapping and shouts of "Amen!" "I was really inspired by the 'greats' like Daryl Coley and Vanessa Bell Armstrong, because I sang so much of their music as a kid."

Church was also an important part of the Huff household Christmas celebration while he was growing up. Before the holiday festivities could begin, Huff's mother insisted that the whole family - including Huff and all four of his brothers and sisters - rise early and attend a sunrise service. "We had to get up early in the morning - 6am," he laughingly recalls, "- and go to that church service, and only then would my mom let us come home and open our gifts!" Though the presents were more simple than lavish in the family's very modest home, warmth and love were always in abundance. "Every Christmas was special for us because we got to share it together," he says.

Huff loves giving gifts at the holidays even more than getting them, especially to his mom, and he doesn't hold anything back in this special collection of Christmas songs. Working with the stellar production team of brothers Cedric and Victor Caldwell (Whitney Houston, Chante Moore, BeBe and CeCe Winans), Huff has crafted a brief collection of beloved Christmas standards that showcase the voice "American Idol" judge Paula Abdul pronounced "enchanting," and leaves listeners hungry for more.

The project opens with a contemporary medley of "Angels We Have Heard on High" and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," wrapping both carols together in smooth urban groove. The cut also subtly works in the melody of the Billy Paul classic "Me and Mrs. Jones," which Huff covered for the American Idol Season 3: Greatest Soul Classics (RCA, 2004) project.

Huff pays homage to his soulful roots with "Silent Night," a favorite hymn since his childhood. "At Christmas time, we'd always turn on the radio and keep moving down the dial till we found 'Silent Night' by The Temptations," he remembers, admitting he loves anything "Christmas-ey" by the legendary group. In Huff's hands, this gentle carol sparkles with warm holiday spirit in a powerful vocal performance.

For "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," Huff hearkens back to classic R&B with rich, sultry vocals that conjure the romance of the season in each emotive note. The EP moves once again to the sacred with Huff's passionate, urban rendition of "Oh, Holy Night" before closing out the list right back in church with his joyful, gospel-styled "Go Tell It On the Mountain."

"I want to share something positive in my music with others, and that's been the best thing about the opportunities I've had from my 'American Idol' experience," Huff reveals. "My dream is to share this gift God has given me with all the people I can, and getting to sing for millions of people around the world has been the proudest moment of my life so far."

With his inspiring first solo outing, George Huff delivers that gift wrapped in the spirit of Christmas on an album that's sure to become part of the holiday tradition for countless fans everywhere, while it heralds a new voice worthy of becoming an old favorite.