

BOB RIVERS

Chipmunks Roasting on an Open Fire (Atlantic)

Making a parody of a novelty song is tricky business at best, but that is the central concept of Bob Rivers' new Christmas novelty album.

"Chipmunks Roasting" is a lightweight collection of the Seattle disc jockey's comic yuletide piffle. The man made famous by the hilarious "Walkin' 'round in Women's Underwear" returns to the Christmas carol territory with highly uneven results.

Some of it is quite funny. "Decorations," to the tune of the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations," is drop-dead funny, and songs such as "Goin' Up to Bethlehem," to the tune of Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Up Around the Bend," are better than clever.

But Mr. Rivers' brand of sound-bite humor, which works well in three-minute breaks on his wacky morning show, wears thin during a full album, even for slavish devotees of poo-poo jokes and other such fare.

The problem is well illustrated by the title song, a parody of the classic, but ultimately irritating Alvin and the Chipmunks, created by 1950s songwriter Ross Bagdasarian. It is a spot-on imitation of Nat King Cole's "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire," and is both clever and well-performed. But it is still nothing more than a novelty song based on a novelty song, a joke ripping off a 40-year-old joke.

— Sean Scully

"Now Hear This"
Dec. 9, 2000