

Have Yourself a Swingin' Little Christmas

By Eric Brace

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RADIO King Orchestra has just released a CD called "Put a Little Boogie in My Stocking," 13 songs that are the perfect soundtrack to a swinging Christmas—and let RKO lay claim to being one of the best big bands around.

Nightwatch

Back in 1996, trumpeter Rick Gordon was freelancing with several jazz bands and pondering. One night when he didn't have a gig booked, he went to hear Retrospect, a wedding and party band led by his former trumpet teacher.

Singing for the band that night was Robin Mallow, and cupid must have been in the audience because that magic thing happened. Soon thereafter Mallow became Robin Gordon, but life was hard then for the newlyweds. Rick had recently joined Doc Scantlin's Imperial Palms Orchestra, and between that and Robin's continuing work with Retrospect, the two didn't have a lot of time together. "We both



Radio King Orchestra, featuring Robin Gordon, has a new CD of holiday music. BY JIM SAAH FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

kept saying, 'One of these days we're going to quit both our bands and do our own thing.' " Rick Gordon says. "The great thing is it actually happened."

In 1998, the Radio King Orchestra debuted, with Rick leading the band and Robin singing in front of it, with a repertoire wider than that of most big bands. "I'm a fanatic for the

hardcore swing," Rick says. "I love Harry James, Tommy Dorsey, Sy Oliver stuff. But with Robin's voice, I knew we could go all over the map."

Rick moved beyond the swing era, arranging several orchestrated pop tunes from the '50s and '60s to suit his wife's range. "She loves Sinatra material like 'Summer Wind,' 'I've Got You Under My Skin,' 'The Best Is Yet to Come,' and I knew we could pull it off, so I transposed



the keys, and now they're in our book."

With its new CD, RKO's repertoire now includes a slew of holiday songs, mostly familiar tunes ("White Christmas," "Winter Wonderland") that are given a full-on swing treatment that's absolutely charming. RKO plays the third Thursday of every month at Timpano's in Rockville, and the CD-release party held there last month was a sardine-packed smash!

Timpano's (12021 Rockville Pike; 301/881-6939) is a free-standing building with plenty of nearby parking, and RKO's appearances almost always guarantee a full house. No wonder, as that monthly event is one of the only places in the area where you can have dinner and dance to big-band sounds. If you can't get in that night, try for Timpano's on Jan. 18. Radio King Orchestra also performs New Year's Eve at the Kennedy Center in the Grand Foyer from 11:30 p.m. to 1 a.m. with admission free, but only to people with tickets to a Kennedy Center event that night. For more information about the band, please go online to www.rkoswing.com.