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Music strikes a chord with gift-givers

One definition of a good gift is one that the recipient wouldn't necessarily have gone out and bought themselves but it ends up being something they cherish for years. With the holidays upon us, here are some artists whose music qualifies as "good gifts."

I received nice feedback to my recent article about James McMurtry, the singer-songwriter-rock and roller who was described as a "great unknown." The artists recommended here fall more or less into that same category. They may be better known than McMurtry, but they're just obscure enough that many people don't have their music in their CD collections or iPods. It's time to change that.

These suggestions lean toward singer-songwriters who have exceptional lyrical and storytelling skills to go with their unique melodies. They're not household names like Elton John or Bruce Springsteen. But my guess is that you could choose any music from any of these recording artists and end up giving a gift that will be

greatly appreciated.

Since some of these artists are obscure, you might be best off going to their Websites to help you decide which CDs or downloads to purchase. You can often hear samples of songs or albums online. But you can feel safe that these are top-notch musicians who rarely put out "bad" records.

SINGER-SONGWriters

John Prine. His early material is particularly outstanding, although his more recent songs still show great insight into human nature. Prine is a one-of-a-kind classic.

Townes Van Zandt. A songwriter's songwriter, his songs have been recorded by lots of other artists, though his sweetly sad renditions of his own material are favored by many.

Loudon Wainwright III. His biggest (only?) hit was a song called "Dead Skunk in the Middle of the Road." His songs combine social commentary, observation and wit. Recent albums feature songs in which



JIM HUDAK
MUSIC NOTES

he addresses his relationship with family members such as his father and his daughter.

TASTEFUL ROCK MUSIC

The Gourds. They were recently introduced to me by a friend who loves great unknown music as much as I do. The Gourds are the real deal. The Austin-based band offers an extraordinary blend of musical instruments from song to song and solid songwriting skills second to none. Sort of like Cajun meets Tex-Mex music and beyond.

PIANO INSTRUMENTALIST-COMPOSER

Michael Dulin. He's a well-

kept secret but a brilliant and often understated pianist and composer. Rich, wonderful piano arrangements. A good album to start with would be "The One I Waited For."

JAZZ AND CLASSICAL
Miles Davis. "Kind of Blue" is regarded as one of the greatest jazz recordings of all time, combining straight ahead blues with low-key musical elegance and improvisation.

Debussy. For classical music, any of his orchestral or symphonic-based recordings are sure to please.

Gustav Holtz. Another surefire classical album would be "The Planets." It's a must for any record collection.

It's a great feeling to be able to give a gift that has staying power. Giving music provides that kind of opportunity.

Jim Hudak's Music Notes column appears regularly in the Clayton Pioneer. Contact him at jimmydak@pacbell.net. His piano music CD's are available from his Website at www.jhudak.com or at amazon.com.

Matt Mazzei – the man behind the lot

ANDRÉ GENSBURGER
 Clayton Pioneer

Lamar "Slats" Mazzei, a decorated World War II veteran, started the Mazzei family in the automobile business, first, as a mechanic, then the service manager until the partners of the dealership where he worked gave him the opportunity to purchase it. The year was 1953.

Today, Mazzei Pontiac, Cadillac, GMC stands on new ground, alongside the freeway in Antioch.

The family had been living in El Cerrito, and then, because of the dealership, they moved to Clayton in 1959.

Matt Mazzei was 6 years old. Along with older brother, Mike and sister Chris, Clayton has remained their home.

"Mom still lives there today," Matt said. "Clayton's home. You can't beat it."

He always worked in his dad's business, "every summer, vacation--anytime I wasn't involved in school or sports," Mazzei said.

"I started as a lot boy, washing down the lot, chasing parts, deliveries, and then I ran the parts department, and after that the service department."

His brother went to Vietnam and afterwards, neither his brother nor sister got involved in the business.

"Dad liked me getting into it," Mazzei said. "We had a good relationship. His philosophy was that you have to touch it and feel

it to understand the business."

Matt Mazzei continued to work his way through the business; selling cars, becoming the finance manager, the general manager and then, in 1982, he bought the dealership from his

present location.

A CVHS graduate, Mazzei still supports the school through various activities, including building a new field. He hopes that his two kids, Angela (25), and Matthew (23) have inherited

The philosophy he learned growing up has dictated his approach to running the dealership. "I never felt I had to live up to my dad's standards. I just did. Ane, between us, we set some high standards."

Mazzei believes that this time-period is the best so far. "Quality is great. We've got full sized SUV's with better gas mileage than Toyota SUV's." While he still prefers the classic designs of the fifties and the sixties models, the newer vehicles are so much more efficient.

In July 2007, Mazzei opened a Hyundai store in Pittsburg, firmly committed to the quality that he has seen in Hyundai over the last several years.

"There was a time when no one would touch Hyundai," Mazzei said. "They've done so much with their cars. The quality is good – they've stepped up to the plate with it. They have a plant in Alabama where they make three models."

"Matt's philosophy has always been to take good care of people," said General Manager, Mark Stone. "We are committed to service."

"My Dad would love the things that we've done in the last five years," Mazzei said. "Our customers do, too. We see that in our repeat business. There's no secret to it – the harder you work, the luckier you get. And if you work with great people, you'll always get through the tough times."



Andre Gensburger/Clayton Pioneer

MATT MAZZEI STANDS IN FRONT of, and behind, his cars.

father. Matt's dad then went on to several enterprising ventures including selling garbage trucks and airplane parts around the world.

"He wound up in Malaysia for ten years, developing a garbage program there," Mazzei said. "We saw him once every six months."

Through this, Matt ran the dealership, watching it grow as did the eastern part of the county. His father died in 1998 and in 2003, the dealership moved to its

his hands-on approach to life.

"Matthew is interested in the business a little," Mazzei said. "But you can't do it out of a book – you need on the job training to make it work." He figures that he will follow his father's approach with his son.

"We've been here a long time," Mazzei said, proudly. "Over half our business is from repeat customers. We're not high pressure. We don't wear ties. The customer has got to be comfortable."

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