

# Reviews

▶ THE DEFINITIVE VERDICT ■ EDITED BY BEN HOMEWOOD

**NME**  
**ALBUM**  
OF THE WEEK

**Mark Kozelek**

**Sings Christmas Carols**

**Strip away their melancholy wrapping and the Sun Kil Moon frontman's festive covers are full of warmth and sincerity**

And so this is Christmas, and what has Mark Kozelek done? If you've kept abreast of the 47-year old's antics this year – he dismissed an audience in North Carolina as “fucking hillbillies” and started a beef with The War On Drugs by labelling the Philadelphia band “beer commercial lead-guitar

shit” at a festival in Ottawa in September – you might be surprised to learn that it's *not* writing a song about what The War On Drugs might like to do to him on the 12th day. Nor has he reinterpreted that other time-honoured Noël classic as ‘O Little Town Of Fuckin’ Hillbillies’. The Sun Kil Moon frontman may revel in the role of indie-rock's great white grinch, but as ‘Sings Christmas Carols’ proves, he's no more immune to the spirit of the season than his furry green counterpart was.

From the moment it was announced late last year, the concept of a Mark Kozelek Christmas album made a wonderfully contrarian kind of sense: the former Red House Painters frontman is one of the least festive figures imaginable, which in the grand tradition of Seuss and Dickens, makes him an ideal candidate. He acknowledges as much on the opening track, ‘Christmas Time Is Here’ (from the much-loved animated TV special ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas’), where his recording engineer plays the role of Linus to Kozelek's cheerless Charlie Brown. “*Mark, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem*”, he laments. “*Of all the Mark Kozeleks in the world, you are the Mark Kozelek-iest*”.

Of all the leftfield ideas he's come up with, however, ‘Sings Christmas Carols’ isn't even close to being the Mark Kozelek-iest. He has a history with this sort of thing: 2001's ‘What's Next To The Moon’ was a collection

of acoustic AC/DC covers, and Modest Mouse received a similar treatment on 2005's ‘Tiny Cities’. Despite the fact that he didn't actually write any of the songs, both of those records could be described as singularly Kozelekian. So it is with this one.

Yes, on first listen, ‘...Sings Christmas Carols’ sounds

## WHO IS MARK KOZELEK?

A guide to the indie-rock Grinch...

### He's the man behind Red House Painters

Formed in San Francisco in 1989, slowcore fixtures Red House Painters released six much-loved albums before splitting up in 2001.

### And Sun Kil Moon...

Kozelek has released six albums under the Sun Kil Moon moniker since 2003. The latest, ‘Benji’, appeared near the top of many Best Of 2014 lists.

### He's also an actor

You may recognise Kozelek from his film appearances. He pops up in *Shoggirl* and *Vanilla Sky*, starring Tom Cruise, but his biggest role was as Stillwater bassist Larry Fellows in 2000's *Almost Famous*.

### ...And can be a bit 'difficult'

It's not uncommon for Kozelek to barrack his own fans, and this year's spat with The War On Drugs has snowballed into the pettiest indie beef in years.

It's an album better suited to quiet contemplation than photocopying your arse at the office party, but it's one you'll find yourself looking forward to digging out again and again. For now, though, turn the lights down low, put some ice in your drink and have yourself a very merry fuckin' Mark Kozelek-y Christmas. ■ BARRY NICOLSON

## ► THE DETAILS

► RELEASE DATE November 1 ► LABEL Caldo Verde ► PRODUCER Mark Kozelek ► LENGTH 41:55 ► TRACKLISTING ► 1. Christmas Time Is Here ► 2. Do You Hear What I Hear ► 3. 2000 Miles ► 4. O Come All Ye Faithful ► 5. O Christmas Tree ► 6. Away In A Manger ► 7. O Little Town Of Bethlehem ► 8. God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen ► 9. Silent Night ► 10. The First Noel ► 11. I Believe In Father Christmas ► 12. Hark The Herald Angels Sing ► 13. What Child Is This ► 14. The Christmas Song ► BEST TRACK Christmas Time Is Here