

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## NY CULTURE

# In NYC, a Downtown Spin on Christmas

A Sampling of the City's Unconventional Christmas Shows



By

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John Waters performs 'A John Waters Christmas' this weekend in New York. *GETTY IMAGES*

When it comes to Christmas in New York City, there are lots of ways to celebrate—especially downtown.

Many are holiday-themed shows staged by unconventional performers such as Murray Hill, a drag king who calls himself “the hardest-working middle-age man in show business.”

“I’m doing Christmas the way I wanted to do it as a kid,” Mr. Hill said.

Billed as “A Murray Little Christmas,” Mr. Hill’s show on Saturday at Greenwich Village’s Le Poisson Rouge is a variety show with a colorful cast that includes the cabaret star Bridget Everett and burlesque performers Perle Noire, Trixie Little and Mr. Gorgeous.

“I have all kinds of whack-jobs in there,” Mr. Hill said of a show he has been presenting at various venues since 1999.



‘I’m doing Christmas the way I wanted to do it as a kid,’ says Murray Hill, who hosts ‘A Murray Little Christmas’ at Le Poisson Rouge. *ERICA BECKMAN*

The television variety shows Mr. Hill grew up watching—by the likes of Dean Martin, Dolly Parton and Sonny & Cher—are what initially inspired him. Then, he added his own twist.

“I’m like everybody’s favorite uncle at Christmastime,” Mr. Hill said of his Borscht Circuit persona, which draws on hammy jokes—“Some people have ’em at the first hello, I have ’em at the wide polyester tie”—and occasional forays into song.

For Mr. Hill’s vocal performance of “Have Yourself a Murray Little Christmas,” an announcement for the show promises that “tissues and earplugs will be available to the audience upon request.”

On Sunday, the downtown show circuit will be treated to a monologue performance by the campy filmmaker John Waters.

In “A John Waters Christmas,” Mr. Waters takes the stage at City Winery in Tribeca to share his holiday hopes and dreams, among them an aspiration to one day produce “a Christmas TV show even more ludicrous than Judy Garland’s,” he said.

His

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#### WHERE TO SEE THEM

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- **Dec. 13:** “A Murray Little Christmas,” Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St.; [lepoissonrouge.com](http://lepoissonrouge.com) (<http://lepoissonrouge.com>)
- **Dec. 14:** “A John Waters Christmas,” City Winery, 155 Varick St.; [citywinery.com/newyork](http://citywinery.com/newyork) (<http://citywinery.com/newyork>)
- **Dec. 17-23:** “Justin Vivian Bond in Star of Light! An Evening of Bi-Polar Witchy Wonder,” Joe’s Pub, 425 Lafayette St.; [joespub.com](http://joespub.com) (<http://joespub.com>)
- **Dec. 17-18:** “Rufus and Martha Wainwright’s Noël Nights,” Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.; [thetownhall.org](http://thetownhall.org) (<http://thetownhall.org>)

current touring show, which plays in 17 cities this year, follows in a lineage that includes a musical release, also titled “A John Waters Christmas,” with collected strange songs such as “Here Comes Fatty Claus” and “Santa Claus Is a Black Man.”

“My relationship to Christmas growing up was good,” Mr. Waters said. “I didn’t have any traumas. But I also recognize that some people hate Christmas and understand how painful it can be.”

When in New York, Mr. Waters said he looks forward to fulfilling his gift-buying duties all at once.

“Mostly I give people books,” he said, citing two of his favorite shops, Ursus Books and Prints on the Upper East Side and 192 Books in Chelsea. “You’d probably be startled to learn that my Christmas parties at home aren’t that weird.”

Next week at Joe’s Pub, the singer and cabaret storyteller Justin Vivian Bond presents “Star of Light! An Evening of Bi-Polar Witchy Wonder.”

The show, which runs from Wednesday to Dec. 23, is “about belief,” the artist said.

“Because we have Christmas, Hanukkah, the solstice and so many different kinds of celebratory events, I decided to do a show about choosing what you believe in—from a sort of pagan witchy perspective.”

Details about the show remain secret, but Justin Vivian Bond spoke of a special fascination with Taylor Swift as New York’s new “global welcome ambassador” and with



Justin Vivian Bond presents 'Star of Light! An Evening of Bi-Polar Witchy Wonder' at Joe's Pub on Dec. 17-23. *MIKE AND CLAIRE*

the religious grounding of Christmas.

“There will be tales of my romance with Jesus,” the artist said. “There’s no reason to think that Jesus doesn’t love me and that I might meet him on OkCupid.”





Rufus and Martha Wainwright, who play Town Hall on Dec. 17-18. *RAMSAY DE GIVE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

On Wednesday and Thursday, the singer-songwriter brother and sister Rufus and Martha Wainwright bring a downtown sensibility to Town Hall on West 43rd Street.

“Rufus and Martha Wainwright’s Noël Nights,” featuring guest appearances by Emmylou Harris, Cyndi Lauper and Renée Fleming, continues the musical tradition started by the siblings’ folk-singing parents, Kate McGarrigle and Loudon Wainwright III.

“It took a long time for me to realize, accept and embrace,” said Rufus Wainwright, “but

it's astounding how much good music there is for Christmas, whether it's religious or classical or jazz or everyday fare. One cannot help but be seduced by the veneer of it all."

Martha Wainwright said the premise of the variety show is to simulate a holiday night at home, with all its coziness and craziness.

"The feeling on stage is very much one of in the living room," she said.

Ms. Wainwright's only concern is what to wear.

"I have a slight clownish element in my closet and in my life," she said.

"Usually what happens is I bring a bunch of things that are crazy, and then Rufus will show up invariably with something absolutely gorgeous, and then I try desperately to find something to match the audacity of his," Ms. Wainwright said. "I try to match his sparkle with color."

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