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American Songbook Classic “Baby It’s Cold Outside” Celebrates 70th Anniversary Amidst Ongoing Firestorm of Sexist Accusations in the “Me Too” Era

When songwriter Frank Loesser (1910-1969) penned the Academy Award-winning romp called “Baby It’s Cold Outside” which appeared in the 1949 M-G-M motion picture musical “Neptune’s Daughter,” the composer could have never dreamed that the playful tune he and his wife Lynn created to sing together at private parties a few years earlier would become a centerpiece in a social revolution decades later.

In fact, once “Baby It’s Cold Outside” was released on a hit record by popular young songstress Margaret Whiting and her mentor and Capitol Records co-founder Johnny Mercer, the song immediately enjoyed tremendous success, selling millions of copies and becoming a beloved evergreen in the Great American Songbook.

The Whiting-Mercer rendition of “Baby It’s Cold Outside,” recorded on March 18, 1949, has become the most enduring version of the song and was not originally intended specifically as a Christmas offering. However, in recent years it has become a holiday staple, enjoying considerable strength via digital streaming as well as ongoing physical releases such as the inclusion on PBS’ 2019 “A Classic Christmas” compact disc collection.

Lately, during the “Me Too” period of “political correctness” and reevaluating relationships between men and women, much controversy has surrounded “Baby It’s Cold Outside.” In 2018, complaints surfaced on social media from those who found the lyrics offensive, claiming the song served as a defacto glorification of date rape. Most recently, John Legend and Kelly Clarkson have recorded a new take on the song which appears on John’s November 8, 2019 Christmas Album release, but this time the lyrics have been changed. Legend partnered with Natasha Rothwell to replace some of Pulitzer Prize winning lyricist Loesser’s original words, with lines deemed less problematic.

When Debbi Whiting heard last year that her mother’s song was being pulled from a radio station in Cleveland, she commented, “This is ridiculous. It was a fun and flirty song that mom recorded with Johnny. What these people are reading into it just isn’t there.” Now, with the Legend-Clarkson redo, Whiting adds, “They’ve gone too far. Frank Loesser was a great songwriter and his work doesn’t need an update any more than Da Vinci’s paintings do. The implication is that Frank wrote a song glorifying date-rape and that mom and Johnny gleefully went along singing about it. That couldn’t be further from who my mother was – a flirt, yes, but also one that did exactly and only what she wanted.”

Debbi Whiting reiterates, “My grandfather, Richard A. Whiting who was a contemporary of Frank Loesser’s and wrote “Hooray for Hollywood,” “Ain’t We Got Fun,” “On the Good Ship Lollipop,” and more, told my mother, ‘sing the songs the way we wrote them, that’s our craft, we’re professionals, and it took us a long time to get them just right.’ Mom had such respect for the songwriters and she would be so disheartened that anyone would change Frank’s lyrics and ascribe such torrid meaning to his song that has entertained generations for 70 years. By changing these lyrics they’ve taken a song that was suggestive, but left things to the imagination, and now they’ve made it explicitly about sex and done exactly what they were complaining about. I feel like I need to speak up for my mother, but, above all, she’d really want me to defend Frank Loesser.”

Since Margaret Whiting & Johnny Mercer took “Baby It’s Cold Outside” to the top of the record charts in 1949, the duet has been sung by legions of popular singers including Dinah Shore & Buddy Clark, Ella Fitzgerald & Louis Jordan, Dean Martin with a female chorus, Ray Charles & Betty Carter, Dolly Parton & Rod Stewart, Garth Brooks & Trisha Yearwood and even Kelly Clarkson and Ronnie Dunn. But the vintage Whiting-Mercer collaboration continues to stand out as an authentic and charming example of warmth and wintertime romance by timeless talent from a simpler time.

The original version is available on all music platforms. Visit margaretwhiting.com for more information. Here’s a link to a video of Margaret and Johnny performing the song in 1968: <https://youtu.be/kF07jVmMSdE>

To set up an interview with Debbi Whiting call 614.325.0879 or send an email to admin@margaretwhiting.com