

When Dawn Willis asked me for a jazzy piano and treble choir arrangement of “a universally recognized but non-religious holiday song...you know, like ‘Walking in a Winter Wonderland,’” no matter how hard I tried to think of other songs that fit the bill, I couldn’t get “Winter Wonderland” out of my head. It didn’t help that it’s in heavy rotation, in dozens of versions, in elevators, lobbies, and places of commerce, from Halloween to New Year’s. But it’s also a fantastically catchy tune, particularly the bridge. I couldn’t help admiring the talent and craft that goes into such catchiness—even though I personally can’t stand the song, which epitomizes for me the dippiness of commercial holiday music. I was rescued from my quandary by the realization that the bridge, with its walking sixths, closely resembles the theme of “Misterioso” by Thelonious Monk—the anti-dippy composer, the apogee of inscrutable cool, his music every bit as catchy but anything but popular, at least when he wrote it. And Dawn had requested a piano jazz element! That sealed the deal: I could not deny the juxtaposition of these two songs, a match made in American popular music heaven. The result is the present arrangement, a quirky quodlibet of “Winter Wonderland” and “Misterioso,” with some sleighbell and classic cell phone rings thrown in for good measure.