**What Makes a Christmas Song Christmassy?**

**Partial Adapt. from** [**https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/what-makes-christmas-music-so-christmassy/**](https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/what-makes-christmas-music-so-christmassy/)

We listen to Christmas songs starting in November and they blast through the 25th of December. Some people hate Christmas songs, as the season itself can be tough and emotional. Another reason for the hate is that the season is cliché and the songs remain the same (or a cash grab from the newest artist ex. Ariana Grande sings Xmas Hits!! Yet Christmas is a multi-billion-dollar industry, so they’re not going to stop for a few people that don’t like the tunes.

Today, we will spend a little time looking at some of my favorites from the season. Then we will look at what elements make a song into a Christmas song.

Finally, you are to choose a song and tell me the elements of why it is such a “Christmas” song in a 250–300-word paragraph. You can present it as well, but this is tentative to the class. The instructions for the mini assignment are on the next page after the write up.

**Classic songs that are worth Listening to:**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjQzJAKxTrE**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjQzJAKxTrE)

Some 80’s.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXQViqx6GMY**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXQViqx6GMY)

Some Maria

**Write up on the Question: What Makes a Christmas Song Christmassy?**

From Tchaikovsky’s The Nutcracker to Mariah Carey’s All I Want for Christmas. These are all the elements that have to be in a Christmas classic

A touch of bitters –  some minor chords

But it’s [Christmas](https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/occasions/christmas/), the season of joy, we hear you cry. And caramel tastes even better with a sprinkling of salt.

The point is, sprinkling minor and diminished chords through a song or piece that’s otherwise in a major key – or even changing key to a minor key for a section – only enhances that warm Christmas fuzzy feeling (to be technical about it).

Take a listen Mariah Carey’s ‘All I Want for Christmas is You’. That chord under ‘presents’ in the opening line is a scrunchy half diminished chord. It’s D minor 7 flat 5 to be exact. That chord on its own does not a Christmas song make.

BUT what that chord does do is bring in that delicious sprinkle of salt that makes your sweet caramel all the sweeter.

**A stirring melody**

Let’s go all the way back to [Tchaikovsky](https://www.classicfm.com/composers/tchaikovsky) for this. Because he is the original and best master of Christmas music.

Let’s take his *Nutcracker* ballet – a work that’s set at Christmas and is performed every winter around the world.

We’ll take the ‘Waltz of the Flowers’ as our example. (But really you could stick a pin in any part of *The Nutcracker* and find an absolutely storming tune).

The waltz opens with a simple but catchy tune before the harp comes in with a shimmering interlude. And then it’s over to the brass and winds who pave the way for the centre-piece of the melody, a soaring, whirling waltz tune from the violins that demands to be hummed along to.

Classic Tchaikovsky.

**A story from the past**

Christmas is 90 per cent nostalgia, so if your Christmas tune can hint at past times, broken hearts (oh hi there [Wham!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8gmARGvPlI)) but a determined optimism for the times ahead – all the better.

Irving Berlin’s ‘White Christmas’ ticks this box and then some.

It was written in the 1940s and become a massive hit in a recording with Bing Crosby. It’s since been covered over 500 (500!!) times.

Those lyrics are doused in more nostalgia than your nan puts sherry on her Christmas pudding:

*I’m dreaming of a white Christmas,*  
*Just like the ones I used to know*  
*Where the treetops glisten and children listen*  
*To hear sleigh bells in the snow.*

In Crosby’s recording the second half of the song is performed by a choir – they sound more distant and fainter than Crosby’s voice. They could almost be ghostly voices from those past Christmases…

And the fact that the recording has that evocative warm crackle of vinyl only feeds that feeling that Christmas really was better in the 1940s.

**Finally… sleigh bells**

This is crucial. In fact, if you don’t include sleigh bells you’ve failed to write a Christmas hit.

And for our example we’re returning to Russia. It’s Prokofiev’s *Troika*. The piece was originally written as music for a film called *Lieutenant Kijé*. But the key thing here is that this is essentially a concerto for sleigh bells.

Listen to this and we defy you not to come over all Christmassy. Right, we’re off to eat a mince pie.

**Your Task Today**

1. Find your own Christmas song. Listen to it and copy down the lyrics right here. (In the box underneath the instructions
2. Determine through medley, lyrics, story & legacy what makes this song you’ve chosen a Christmas song.
3. Write a 250 – 300-word reflection style paragraph on the impact the song has on you (if any) and how this song is representative of the season – despite your celebration of the holiday itself.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Song You Chose: | Brief Analysis of Song Lyrics (Data) |
|  |  |