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Heather Gibson
University of Central Florida



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The Good, the Bad and the Quintessential Christmas Music

By Heather Gibson
UCF Forum columnist

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There are two types of people: those like myself, who the day after Thanksgiving turn their radio to the all-Christmas music station, and the rest of you Grinchy McGrinchersons.

I have a wide selection of songs I like to hear. Nothing brings me to tears faster than a beautiful Silent or O Holy Night, but I still want a Hula-Hoop with the Chipmunks, I get angered by Rudolph's bullies, and Frosty melts my heart. I think "Christmas in Prison" is egregiously underplayed, as is "Christmas Card from a Hooker in Minneapolis."

I have equally strong thoughts about songs I don't want to hear, too. I'd be happy if "The Little Drummer Boy" broke his drumsticks and was never heard from again. When "Do You Hear What I Hear?" comes on the radio, I yell "No, I do not!" and turn the station.

And then there's the unnecessary-recordings category.

What are unnecessary recordings? These are the ones that never should have been recorded because there already existed a perfect version of that song, a version that could never be topped.

And once the perfect version is established, future recordings should be outlawed. I understand why artists record Christmas albums; if ever there were a cash cow, holiday tunes is it. But that does not mean I want to "Deck the Halls" with the Biebs.

Seriously, does anyone *really* think they can improve upon Judy Garland's "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"? That takes some gall. These quintessential recordings weren't necessarily first, but they should be the last.

Here are the 12 quintessential recordings of holiday songs that should never be recorded again:

Nat King Cole's "The Christmas Song" - It's been recorded by everyone from Aaliyah to Lovedrug to Dwight Yoakam since Cole's original recording, and every single one of them has been superfluous.

Eartha Kitt's "Santa Baby" - Sorry, Madge, love (almost) everything else you've done, but like "Dick Tracy," this song didn't need a contemporary makeover.

Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" - We had a small debate about this in the office. This was a favorite for everyone, save one person, who is wrong. Bing gets an honorable mention for "I'll Be Home for Christmas," as well.

Bruce Springsteen's "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" - If the live version of this song doesn't make you feel good about the visit from the fat man in a red suit, you have a heart that is two sizes too small. Even Bruce can't make it through the song without cracking up.

Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You" - She wrote it. She produced it. She sang it. It is hers and it is perfect as is. So is that silly home movie of her romping in the snow with Santa.

Gayla Peevey's "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas" - She recorded this song when she was 10. This and every other detail of her life, including the names of the attending physician at her birth and her first crush, are available on her website. Visit it, because you absolutely must see the video of the youngster singing about hippos on The Ed Sullivan Show in a ruffled confection of a Christmas dress.

The Carpenter's "Merry Christmas, Darling" - Really, anything by the Carpenters is high on the list. I'll even give them a pass on their recording of "The Christmas Song." Christmas just isn't Christmas without the Carpenters.

The Jackson 5's "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" - Michael was a seriously cute kid with a seriously awesome voice. And the soulful "kissing, kissing" in the background is the bow on the package.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Happy Xmas (War is Over)" - It's been covered several times, most notably by Sarah McLachlan, but c'mon. Nothing can ever compare to John Lennon's emotional plea for global healing.

Band Aid's 1984 "Do They Know It's Christmas" - When first recorded, this song had a lot of heart, and was a perfect time capsule of the mid-80s pop rock scene. The fact that someone, nay a mass of people, thought it would be a good idea to rerecord this song not only in 1989, but also in 2004 and 2014 is just...why? 1984's *The Karate Kid* didn't need a remake, and neither did this song. The only redeeming quality of the later versions is that they dropped the astonishingly bad original lyric about suffering: "Well, tonight thank God it's them instead of you."

John Denver and The Muppets' "Twelve Days of Christmas" - Not only is it a perfect version of the song, it is the only complete version I can stand to listen to. Miss Piggy was meant to sing "five golden rings." And every countdown includes new treats and surprises. Ba-dum-dum-dum!

Elvis Presley's "Blue Christmas" - Woo-ooo-ooo-oooo. Woo-ooo-ooo-oooo. Woo-ooo-ooo-oooo. Long live the King! The rest of you ain't got no swing.

Feel free to expand my list; in fact, I'd add Wham!'s "Last Christmas" and the Boston Pops' "Sleigh Ride" if there were Fourteen Days of Christmas.

Whatever you include, just remember that our joyous listening period will soon be over as we move into “Auld Lang Syne” and the hope of some new Christmas classics next year. Just, please, hands off the ones on this list.

Heather Gibson is marketing director for the UCF School of Performing Arts in the College of Arts & Humanities She can be reached at heather.gibson@ucf.edu.