Top 5 Christmas Songs [B2]

Dai canti più classici ai successi pop: il Natale porta con sé un repertorio di canzoni dallo spirito allegro, perfette da cantare con parenti e amici... e per esercitarsi con l'inglese!

It's the most wonderful time of the year and the **airwaves** are **clogged up** with songs of seasonal celebration **extolling** the joys of the festive season. Christmas hymns have been performed in the home since the 4th century, but they did not find a larger, more public audience until a millennium later, when the first **carols** appeared. Carols retell the nativity story and they are often performed at religious services. The carol Silent Night, which dates to early 19th-century Austria, was sung by British and German soldiers during the Christmas **truce** of 1914, a spontaneous **ceasefire** that took place on the Western Front during World War One.

SECULAR SONGS

As Christmas has become more secular, non-religious festive songs have begun to appear. Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, the most-played Christmas song in history, was composed in 1935, and has been covered by Bruce Springsteen, Frank Sinatra and The Jackson 5. Repeating "you'd better..." before a series of suggestions (though the term is usually used as a **warning** or even a **threat**!), the song also repeats the present continuous form.

ALBUMS

It has become common practice for successful singers to record Christmas songs or even entire albums. Bing Crosby's White Christmas, first **release**d in 1942, is the best-selling song ever; both The Beatles and Queen sent special recordings of the song to their fan club members. In 2009, Bob Dylan surprised fans with an entire album of Christmas songs, entitled "Christmas in the Heart", while Canadian singer-songwriter Michael Bublé's 2011 **release** Christmas has sold over sixteen million copies.

BAND AID

Understanding the commercial power of the Christmas single, in 1984, Irish singer and activist Bob Geldof gathered together the biggest stars in music to record Do They Know It's Christmas?, with **proceeds** benefitting **famine aid** in Ethiopia. It is still the UK's biggest-selling Christmas song. Other perennial favourites include Mariah Carey's All I Want for Christmas and Last Christmas by Wham!, although a recent UK **poll** listed the duet **Fairytale** of New York by Irish band The Pogues and featuring English singer Kirsty MacColl as the best festive song ever. Lyrically rich and wildly imaginative, this **foul-mouthed** Irish ballad describes an immigrant couple's disillusionment with the **hardships** of a life lived far from home. For many listeners it reflected the **harsh** realities of Christmastime. Possibly the festive season's most persistent **earworm**, this song was originally a **sleigh**ing song, with the rhythm **mimicking** a trotting horse's bells — a necessary adornment, as **hooves** were inaudible in the snow. It became associated with Christmas decades after it was first performed, and is particularly good if you want to improve English rhythm and intonation, as well as pronunciation: note that '**sleigh**' rhymes with 'way'. Contrary to common belief, '**Jingle**' is an imperative verb here, rather than an adjective! **Jingle** bells, jingle bells **Jingle** all the way Oh what fun it is to ride in a One horse open **sleigh** John Lennon and Yoko Ono were active peace **advocates**, famously staging a **bed-in** for their 1969 honeymoon. This is a **paean** to optimism and unity that was written **at the height of** the Vietnam War protests. It opens with John and Yoko wishing their children a Happy Christmas (Xmas is an abbreviation, originating from the Greek letter chi.) The first verse features a question in the present perfect, while the **chorus** uses the zero conditional with "War is over if you want it". So this is Christmas And what have you done? Another year over And a new one just begun A simple tale of a Christmas **breakup**, this was once, infamously, the best-selling single to never reach number one in the UK, finally making it to the top of the charts thirty-six years after its **release**. With the **advent** of streaming, it has become a perennial **chart topper** and there is even a viral game called Whamageddon where participants must **avoid** hearing the song! The **chorus** uses the past simple and 'to' for intentions. Last Christmas, I gave you my heart But the very next day, you gave it away This year, to save

me from tears I'll give it to someone special This Christmas classic offered a comforting message of hope and community during World War Two. The Oscar-winning ballad from 1942 was written by Irving Berlin for the musical film Holiday Inn where it was sung by **crooner** Bing Crosby. Widely recognised as the best-selling single of all time (although the exact **figures** are unavailable.) The lyrics include the present continuous, 'used to' for past states, and 'to' for intentions. 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 This fun, **upbeat** Christmas favourite **spurns** the commerciality of the season in favour of a gift of love. Although only moderately successful on its initial **release**, the song has gained traction over the decades and, thanks to streaming, has topped the festive charts every year since 2019. The lyrics use 'could' for possibility as well as comparative and imperative. I just want you for my own More than you could ever know Make my wish come true All I want for Christmas is you!   Click here and listen to the Spotify playlist with the Top 5 Christmas Songs of all time. Fergal Kavanagh runs the website www.tuneintoenglish.com, the web's largest free resource for learning English through pop music. Click here and you'll have access to the worksheets for the songs included in this article.

Glossary

- **clogged up** = intasare, saturare
- **truce** = tregua
- **warning** = avvertimento
- **sleighing song** = canto natalizio
- **ceasefire** = cessate il fuoco
- **advocates** = attivisti
- **upbeat** = allegra, vivace
- **spurns** = disdegnare, respingere
- **famine aid** = aiuti contro la carestia
- **sleigh** = slitta
- **bed-in** = protesta a letto
- **at the height of** = nel pieno di
- **treetops** = cime degli alberi
- **glisten** = brillare, luccicare
- **foul-mouthed** = sboccata, volgare
- **mimicking** = imitare
- **hooves** = zoccoli
- **paean** = inno
- **chart topper** = in vetta alla classifica
- **avoid** = evitare
- **harsh** = dure
- **airwaves** = frequenze radio
- **extolling** = esaltare, celebrare
- **carols** = canti natalizi
- **hardships** = difficoltà
- **chorus** = ritornello
- **proceeds** = profitti, ricavi
- **poll** = sondaggio
- **breakup** = rottura amorosa
- **release** = lancio, uscita
- **threat** = minaccia
- **Fairytale** = fiaba
- **earworm** = tormentone

- **Jingle** = tintinnare
- **advent** = avvento
- **crooner** = cantante melodico
- **figures** = cifre