



# CHRISTMAS MUSIC



Scan to review worksheet

Expemo code:  
192Z-E7IA-UGBH



1

## Warm-up

Do you have a favourite Christmas song? Is there any Christmas song that you truly cannot listen to anymore?



2

## Key words

Match the terms on the left to the definitions on the right.

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1. airing     | a. a great liking for someone or something                                 |
| 2. hum        | b. a group of musical notes sounded together at the same time              |
| 3. an earworm | c. a set of musical notes based on one particular note (e.g. C major)      |
| 4. cheesy     | d. a transmission of a programme, song or video on television or the radio |
| 5. a chord    | e. a very catchy song or tune  |
| 6. a key      | f. (informal) trying too hard to be funny, sweet, emotional or sentimental |
| 7. fondness   | g. to sing with closed lips  |



## 3

**Before you read**

You are going to read a short article about our love-hate relationship with festive songs. Before you read, discuss in pairs what you think about each statement below and decide whether they are true or false.

1. Half the Christmas songs we hear are annoying.
2. Regardless of our preferences, Christmas tunes bring people together.
3. Songs full of sleigh bells are generally regarded as cheesy.
4. 'Under the Mistletoe' by Justin Bieber is the best-selling Christmas song of all time.
5. When people hear a new song for the first time, they usually do not like it.

Now read the article and confirm or correct your answers according to the information in the text.





## THE CONVERSATION

## Christmas earworms

### The science behind our love-hate relationship with festive songs

*Adapted from TheConversation.com, Alexandra Lamont, December 18, 2017*

1. In the run-up to Christmas, we're exposed to a shower of festive music – on the radio and television, in shops, train stations, restaurants, pubs and bars. In the UK, old favourite bands are being played everywhere along with newer singers like Kelly Clarkson and Justin Bieber. And, of course, Britain's two most popular Christmas songs by Mariah Carey and The Pogues are getting their annual airing.
2. So are you humming Jingle Bells or All I Want for Christmas while you wrap your presents? Catchy music, "sticky tunes" or earworms, as they have become known, are songs that get stuck in our heads – and while about two-thirds are pleasant, some can become quite annoying.
3. Musically, earworms seem to come more often from songs which have fairly conventional melodic patterns together with something unusual – a key change, or unexpected repetitions.
4. There's a popular article written by journalism professor Adam Ragusea, who claims to have identified a mysterious "Christmas chord" that might explain the popularity of Christmas songs and why they give us earworms, although not all commentators are entirely convinced. But research suggests that even though there could be some common features, the specific songs that make earworms are different from person to person.
5. What's different about Christmas music is we are all listening to a much smaller pool of musical options at this time of year. Because of the dominance of Christmas music in public places such as shops and bars, we all get a lot more exposure to the same songs than we do at other times of year. So we could argue that Christmas music helps bring us together – whether we love it or hate it.
6. **Dreaming of a hit record**  
Among the cheesy sleigh bells-filled tunes, there are some great Christmas classics – and it's interesting to note that White Christmas by Irving Berlin is not only consistently one of the most well-known Christmas songs but is the best-selling song of all time. It also has the characteristics of an earworm, and it contains that funny "Christmas chord". But how does a song like that maintain its popularity over the decades?
7. According to some theories, when we first hear a new piece of music, we tend to not like it very much. But repetition sparks liking – and repetition both within a song and through repeated listening over days, weeks and months will usually increase our fondness.
8. There's a limit to this repetition effect. Too much of it sends liking down the other side of the curve, meaning that when we have heard something too much we eventually, and quickly, get quite fed up with it. In one research study, we find that people regulate their own exposure to their own music over very long periods of time.
9. A lot of Christmas music, whether we think it's good or bad, will be more popular than it might deserve to be as it usually only gets aired a few months of the year. By the time we're taking down the Christmas tree in January, we've all become fully sick of Mariah and so we put it away in the attic with the tree, to be dusted off and enjoyed again next year.



## 4

**Checking understanding**

Answer the questions.

1. Musically speaking, how are Christmas 'earworms' constructed?
2. According to professor Adam Ragusea, why are Christmas songs so popular?
3. Why do we tend to listen to fewer songs during Christmas?
4. What other theory explains why Christmas songs are popular?
5. What is the downside of this?

## 5

**Find the words**

Find words or phrases in the text which mean ...

1. the period before an important event (P1, noun phrase)
2. repeated again and again in our minds (P2, phrase)
3. cause (people) to be friendly with each other (P5, phrasal verb)
4. activates, causes to start (P7, verb)
5. a line that bends continuously, not straight (P8, noun)
6. annoyed or bored with something (P8, phrasal verb)
7. removing decorations (P9, phrasal verb + ing)
8. to prepare something for use, especially after a long time (P9, phrasal verb)

## 6

**Talking point**

Discuss any of the questions below in pairs or small groups.

1. Do you enjoy Christmas music? Why/why not?
2. How do you feel about the commercialization of the Christmas season?
3. Do you decorate the inside and outside of your home for Christmas?
4. Do people celebrate Christmas in your country? How?



# Key

## 1. Warm-up

Encourage a short discussion

## 2. Key words

1. d      2. g      3. e      4. f      5. b      6. c      7. a

## 3. Before you read

1. False: while about two-thirds are pleasant, some can become quite annoying
2. True
3. True
4. False: White Christmas by Irving Berlin is the best-selling song of all time.
5. True: According to some theories, when we first hear a new piece of music we tend not to like it very much

## 4. Checking understanding

1. They have fairly conventional melodic patterns together with something unusual: a key change, or unexpected repetitions.
2. They use a mysterious "Christmas chord".
3. Because of the dominance of Christmas music in public places such as shops and bars, we all get a lot more exposure to the same songs than we do at other times of year.
4. They are repeated so often.
5. We can get fed up with the songs.

## 5. Find the words

1. the run-up to
2. stuck in our heads
3. bring together
4. sparks
5. curve
6. fed up with
7. taking down
8. dust off