

Christmas Classics Still Rule, But Listeners Want a Later Start, According to P1 Media Group's 2026 Christmas Music Study

America's Top 100 Christmas Songs: Bobby Helms' "Jingle Bell Rock" Remains #1; 100 Recordings Represent Just 55 Unique Songs; 56% Prefer Christmas Music to Begin Thanksgiving or Later

Christmas classics continue to dominate America's holiday music favorites, but listeners increasingly favor a later start to the all-Christmas radio season, according to P1 Media Group's annual *America's Top 100 Christmas Songs* study, sponsored by GoldDisc by TM Studios.

The research reveals the enduring strength of traditional holiday favorites. **The 100 most-played Christmas recordings represent just 54 unique songs**, demonstrating how familiar holiday standards continue to resonate with listeners across multiple artists and generations.

The power of Christmas programming was once again evident in Nielsen Audio's Holiday 2025 ratings. All-Christmas stations ranked #1 in numerous major markets,

including Los Angeles (KOST, 13.3 share), Chicago (WLIT, 12.4), Boston (WMJX, 13.5), and St. Louis (KEZK, 17.6), among listeners ages 6 and older.

"Christmas music continues to be one of radio's most powerful audience magnets," said **Ken Benson, Founder and Partner of P1 Media Group**. "The Nielsen ratings demonstrate its extraordinary ability to attract listeners, but our research also reveals an important shift. While Americans still love their Christmas classics, they're becoming more selective about when they want the holiday season to begin."

P1 Media Group's nationwide study surveyed 400 radio listeners ages 25–54 across America's Top 50 radio markets, testing the appeal of the 100 most-played Christmas recordings from the 2025 holiday season, according to Mediabase.

Christmas Classics Continue to Dominate

For nine of the past ten years, Bobby Helms' 1957 recording of "Jingle Bell Rock" has held its position as America's #1 Christmas song. This year, Helms again leads the national rankings with an appeal score of 80.80 on a 100-point scale.

José Feliciano's "Feliz Navidad" ranks second, followed by Andy Williams' "Sleigh Ride," Frank Sinatra's "Jingle Bells," and Bing Crosby's "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas."

Remarkably, three different versions of "Jingle Bell Rock" rank among the Top 10: Bobby Helms at #1, Brenda Lee at #6, and Daryl Hall & John Oates at #7. The Hall & Oates version also earns the highest percentage of "Love" ratings among all 100 recordings, at 59.66%.

"Christmas music has an extraordinary ability to connect generations of listeners," said Benson. "Our research continues to demonstrate that the classics aren't simply surviving—they're thriving. These songs have become an essential part of the holiday experience, and their appeal remains remarkably consistent year after year."

The overall strength of the Christmas music library is equally impressive. Of the 100 recordings tested, 34 earned appeal scores of 75 or higher, while 87 scored 70 or higher.

Just 55 Unique Songs Account for the Top 100 Recordings

One of the study's most revealing findings is the remarkable concentration of familiar Christmas standards.

Although 100 recordings were tested, they represent only 55 unique songs. Multiple interpretations of the same holiday favorites continue to earn strong listener appeal, reinforcing the value of familiar music delivered by different artists.

Five versions each of "Frosty the Snowman" and "Sleigh Ride" appear among the Top 100.

Four versions each of "Carol of the Bells," "Holly Jolly Christmas," "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas," "Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," and "Winter Wonderland" also make the list.

Together, these nine holiday standards account for **38% of the Top 100 recordings**.

Bing Crosby, Gene Autry, Amy Grant, and Andy Williams are the most represented artists, each appearing four times in the rankings.

"This is what makes Christmas music different from almost every other format," Benson said. "Listeners don't necessarily want just one definitive version of a favorite song. Many of these classics have multiple interpretations that audiences know and love. For programmers, that creates opportunities to deliver variety without sacrificing familiarity."

Traditional Holiday Favorites Stand the Test of Time

Despite decades of new Christmas releases, recordings from the 1950s and 1960s continue to anchor holiday music programming.

More than half of the Top 100 recordings—55—were originally released before 1980. The 1950s lead all decades with 22 recordings, followed by the 1960s with 19.

These findings reinforce the extraordinary staying power of Christmas music. Recordings that have entertained audiences for more than half a century continue to compete successfully with newer holiday releases.

Christmas Music Preferences Differ by Age and Gender

While the classics demonstrate broad appeal, the research reveals meaningful differences among audience segments.

Top-testing songs by gender:

- **Women:** Frank Sinatra, "Jingle Bells" — 83.43
- **Men:** David Foster, "Carol of the Bells" — 81.40

Top-testing songs by age:

- **Ages 25–34:** Bing Crosby, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" — 86.50
- **Ages 35–44:** Frank Sinatra, "Jingle Bells" — 82.00
- **Ages 45–54:** Burl Ives, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" — 85.52

Interestingly, listeners ages 45–54 demonstrate the strongest overall appeal for the tested Christmas music library, averaging a 77.10 score across the 100 recordings. That compares with 74.11 among ages 25–34 and 71.60 among ages 35–44.

Contemporary Christmas Hits Earn Their Place

Although traditional recordings dominate, several original Christmas songs released during the 2010s continue to connect with holiday music fans.

Ariana Grande's "Santa Tell Me" ranks #43, and Kelly Clarkson's "Underneath the Tree" ranks #83.

Grande's "Santa Tell Me" demonstrates particularly strong appeal among younger listeners, earning an 80.85 score among adults ages 25–34.

These results suggest that contemporary Christmas titles can complement traditional holiday favorites, particularly when selected with a station's target audience in mind.

Christmas Music Fans Increasingly Favor a Later Start

One of the most significant findings in the 2026 research is the continued movement toward a later start for all-Christmas radio programming.

Only **18% of respondents prefer stations to begin all-Christmas programming in early November**, down from 23% in 2025 and 31% in 2024.

Meanwhile, **56% of Christmas music fans now prefer stations to wait until Thanksgiving or later**, compared with 49% in 2025.

Preferred starting dates for all-Christmas programming:

- **Thanksgiving:** 28%, up from 23% in 2025
- **Mid-November:** 26%, down from 28%
- **Beginning of December:** 25%, up from 18%
- **Early November:** 18%, down from 23% in 2025 and 31% in 2024
- **Mid-December:** 3%, down from 8%

"The numbers tell a compelling story," said Benson. "In just two years, the percentage of listeners who want Christmas music to begin in early November has fallen from 31% to 18%. At the same time, a growing majority now prefers stations to wait until Thanksgiving or later."

For programmers, the findings highlight the importance of balancing the ratings potential of an early Christmas launch with changing listener preferences.

Listeners Still Want Christmas Music Beyond Christmas Day

While holiday music fans increasingly prefer a later start, many still want the Christmas music season to extend beyond December 25.

Forty-two percent of respondents prefer all-Christmas programming to continue through New Year's Eve, although that percentage has declined from 48% in 2025 and 52% in 2024.

Another 33% would prefer stations to end Christmas programming on December 26, while 20% favor Christmas Day. Three percent selected December 27, and 3% preferred another ending date.

"Successful Christmas programming isn't just about playing the right songs," Benson concluded. "It's about understanding your audience, knowing when they're ready for the season to begin, and delivering the right mix of familiar favorites and

contemporary hits. Christmas music remains one of radio's greatest programming opportunities, but timing and execution matter."

P1 Media Group's 2026 ***America's Top 100 Christmas Songs*** study is proudly sponsored by TM Studios and GoldDisc Christmas — the holiday music library built for radio, available at https://tmstudios.com/golddisc-christmas

P1 Media Group presents America's Top 100 Christmas Songs of 2026				
Rank	Song	Artist	Year	25-54 Score
1	Jingle Bell Rock	Bobby Helms	1957	80.80
2	Feliz Navidad	José Feliciano	1970	80.37
3	Sleigh Ride	Andy Williams	1965	80.22
4	Jingle Bells	Frank Sinatra	1957	80.14
5	It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas	Bing Crosby	1951	79.96
6	Jingle Bell Rock	Brenda Lee	1964	79.70
7	Jingle Bell Rock	Daryl Hall & John Oates	1983	79.34
8	We Wish You a Merry Christmas	Bing Crosby	1962	79.31
9	Carol of the Bells	Mannheim Steamroller	1988	79.11
10	Ring Christmas Bells	Ray Conniff	1962	79.10
11	Deck the Halls	Percy Faith	1954	78.96
12	Carol of the Bells	David Foster	1993	78.69
13	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Burl Ives	1964	78.55
14	We Wish You a Merry Christmas	Kenny G	2005	78.51
15	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Dean Martin	1959	78.38
16	Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree	Brenda Lee	1958	77.96
17	It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year	Andy Williams	1963	77.89
18	Last Christmas	Wham!	1984	77.65
19	A Holly Jolly Christmas	Burl Ives	1964	77.34
20	Winter Wonderland	Andy Williams	1965	77.11
21	Santa Claus Is Coming to Town	Frank Sinatra & Cyndi Lauper	1992	76.93
22	Deck the Halls	Nat King Cole	1960	76.70
23	Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree	LeAnn Rimes	2004	76.54
24	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Gene Autry	1949	76.50
25	Carol of the Bells	John Tesh Project	1994	76.41
26	Jingle Bells	Ray Conniff	1959	76.39
27	A Holly Jolly Christmas	Michael Bublé	2011	76.24
28	The Christmas Song	Nat King Cole	1946	76.21

29	Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!	Dean Martin	1959	75.94
30	Carol of the Bells	Lindsey Stirling	2017	75.92
31	Santa Baby	Madonna	1987	75.71
32	Sleigh Ride	Amy Grant	1983	75.69
33	I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus	The Jackson 5	1970	75.54
34	Here Comes Santa Claus	Gene Autry	1947	75.39
35	It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas	Johnny Mathis	1986	74.88
36	All I Want for Christmas Is You	Mariah Carey	1994	74.80
37	Sleigh Ride	Air Supply	1987	74.77
38	Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree	Amy Grant	1992	74.74
39	Faeries	Mannheim Steamroller	2001	74.73
40	Frosty the Snowman	Willie Nelson	1979	74.69
41	Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)	Mariah Carey	1994	74.64
42	Winter Wonderland	Amy Grant	1992	74.63
43	Santa Tell Me	Ariana Grande	2014	74.59
44	Do You Hear What I Hear?	Carrie Underwood	2007	74.59
45	Linus and Lucy	Vince Guaraldi Trio	1965	74.59
46	Run Rudolph Run	Chuck Berry	1958	74.54
47	Winter Wonderland	Johnny Mathis	1958	74.46
48	Sleigh Ride	The Ronettes	1963	74.42
49	Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas	The Carpenters	1978	74.34
50	Christmas Eve/Sarajevo 12/24	Trans-Siberian Orchestra	1996	74.28
51	You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch	Thurl Ravenscroft	1966	74.27
52	Sleigh Ride	Leroy Anderson	1952	73.97
53	Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)	Darlene Love	1963	73.97
54	Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!	Frank Sinatra	1950	73.77
55	White Christmas	Bing Crosby	1947	73.67
56	Santa Claus Is Coming to Town	The Jackson 5	1970	73.36
57	Have a Holly Jolly Christmas	Johnny Mathis	2002	73.35
58	It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas	Perry Como	1951	73.26
59	Santa Claus Is Coming to Town	Mariah Carey	1994	73.14
60	It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year	Amy Grant	1992	73.06
61	Happy Xmas (War Is Over)	John Lennon	1971	72.93
62	Frosty the Snowman	Ray Conniff	1959	72.79
63	Last Christmas	Taylor Swift	2007	72.77
64	Frosty the Snowman	Bing Crosby	1962	72.76
65	Blue Christmas	Elvis Presley	1957	72.72
66	Do They Know It's Christmas?	Band Aid	1984	72.68
67	Home for the Holidays	The Carpenters	1984	72.63
68	Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)	Michael Bublé	2011	72.63
69	Frosty the Snowman	Gene Autry	1950	72.62

70	Frosty the Snowman	Jimmy Durante	1950	72.53
71	Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!	Harry Connick Jr.	1993	72.52
72	A Holly Jolly Christmas	Lady A	2012	72.51
73	Santa Claus Is Coming to Town	Bruce Springsteen	1981	72.45
74	Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	Harry Connick Jr.	1993	72.42
75	Up on the House Top	Gene Autry	1953	72.34
76	Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!	Martina McBride	1998	72.30
77	O Tannenbaum	Vince Guaraldi Trio	1965	72.30
78	Do You Hear What I Hear?	Martina McBride	1999	71.51
79	This Christmas	Train	2016	71.22
80	The Chipmunk Song	The Chipmunks	1958	71.12
81	Winter Wonderland	Air Supply	1987	71.02
82	This Christmas	Christina Aguilera	2000	70.95
83	Underneath the Tree	Kelly Clarkson	2013	70.75
84	White Christmas	The Drifters	1954	70.49
85	Here Comes Santa Claus	Elvis Presley	1957	70.26
86	Home for the Holidays	Perry Como	1954	70.19
87	Please Come Home for Christmas	Eagles	1978	70.10
88	Where Are You Christmas?	Faith Hill	2000	69.80
89	It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas	Michael Bublé	2011	69.70
90	Happy Holiday / The Holiday Season	Andy Williams	1963	69.64
91	Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays	*NSYNC	1998	69.37
92	This Christmas	Donny Hathaway	1970	69.09
93	Wonderful Christmastime	Paul McCartney	1979	68.80
94	I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm	Pentatonix & Frank Sinatra	2025	68.48
95	All I Want for Christmas Is You	Vince Vance & the Valiants	1989	68.38
96	Little Saint Nick	The Beach Boys	1963	67.07
97	Christmas Canon	Trans-Siberian Orchestra	1998	66.88
98	Someday at Christmas	Stevie Wonder	1966	66.79
99	Step into Christmas	Elton John	1973	66.31
100	What Christmas Means to Me	Stevie Wonder	1967	64.69
		Average of 100 titles:	**1977**	**74.01**

The complete 2026 America's Top 100 Christmas Songs study is available at https://p1mediagroup.com/americas-1-testing-christmas-songs-2026/

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About the Survey

P1 Media Group conducted its annual online Christmas Music Research November 1–2, 2026, surveying 400 radio listeners ages 25–54 from America's Top 50 radio markets.

Participants were required to listen "Frequently" or "Sometimes" to an all-Christmas music radio station during the holiday season and rate their enjoyment of Christmas music a 7 or higher on a 10-point scale.

The survey also measured respondents' streaming habits. Sixty-three percent reported listening to music on streaming services such as Spotify or Apple Music every day, while another 27% reported streaming a few days per week.

The test list was compiled from the 100 most-played Christmas recordings on American radio during the 2025 holiday season, according to Mediabase.

The full research results are available at https://p1mediagroup.com/americas-1-testing-christmas-songs-2026/

About P1 Media Group

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P1 Media Group is a global media research and strategy consultancy offering the expertise and resources of a large consultancy with the understanding, empathy, and honesty of a small one. Through customized research, programming strategies, and audience insights, P1 Media Group helps radio stations build stronger brands, grow listening, and connect more deeply with their audiences.

CONTACT

KEN BENSON
1.360.910.4119
ken@p1mediagroup.com