



Christmas Music - Song or Carol

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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It's December and we are surrounded with reminders that the Christmas season is before us. Outdoor lights on businesses and houses seem to have magically appeared from nowhere. Christmas tree lots have opened. Mailboxes are filled with flyers with the hopes that shoppers will be tempted to purchase items from their pages. And all around us are the sounds of seasonal music.

Television commercials use soundtracks that we recognize from our childhood. We know the words to the tunes played and sung at the numerous concerts and events that we will attend over the next few weeks. We search our private music collections for favourites to get us in the spirit. Malls and elevators softly play the music that is usually reserved for the last month of the year.

I have been thinking about the fact that there are actually two categories of Christmas music that we all know well - songs and carols. They are often heard within minutes of each other but there are very distinct differences between them:

1. Theme - Christmas carols are about the birth of Jesus and the characters who participated in the spiritual aspects of our celebrations. We sing about Bethlehem, wise men, angels and the baby who was born in a stable. Christmas songs, on the other hand, are usually about more contemporary situations and often involve romance, gifts, or fun.

2. Origin - You can usually tell the age of a tune by looking at the words and the manner in which they were crafted into lyrics. "Round yon virgin" is not a phrase that we would use in everyday conversation. When we sing carols, however, we usually don't need to have written song sheets because we memorized the ancient wording as children. In contrast, Christmas songs are made up of words and ideas that we would more commonly use with each other like "All I want for Christmas is you" or "We wish you a Merry Christmas".

3. Performers and settings - Church choirs do not sing Christmas songs during religious services and some Christmas concerts do not include carols. Situations are unique and there aren't any set rules though. You might find a mix of carols and songs during a concert held in a church or when groups go from house to house in a practice known as caroling.

4. Reaction - It's hard to imagine that someone could listen to "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer" or "All I want For Christmas is my Two Front Teeth" without a little giggle. On the other hand, people who hear or sing the Christmas carols usually cry, smile or just enjoy a feeling of peace.

Each of us has unique emotions that are often triggered by past experiences.

Throughout this Christmas season, think about the lyrics you hear, the memories they evoke and how your life has been impacted by each of these songs and carols!