

Top 10 Christmas Albums

From [Robert Fontenot](#),
Your Guide to [Oldies Music](#).
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Here's a list of the best Christmas albums of the oldies era (approximately from 1945-1975), as hand-picked by your Guide (me!). It's subjective, of course, but it covers the early days of rock and roll in search of what I consider the greatest holiday oldies compilations. If you have a suggestion for upcoming lists, [e-mail me!](#)

1. [Various Artists, "A Christmas Gift For You From Phil Spector"](#)

It's only 35 minutes long, but this masterpiece is often considered the greatest Christmas CD of all time, and always considered the best Christmas CD rock and roll itself has ever offered. Constructed by Wall Of Sound genius and teen tycoon Phil Spector as a real work of art, not just a collection of tracks, he uses all the artists in his stable (and all his resources behind the boards) to create a festive, powerful, layered holiday SOUND that has never been equaled. Simply breathtaking.

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2. [Various Artists, "Time Life Treasury Of Christmas"](#)

If you need a collection that cuts across musical genre lines and effortlessly blends spiritual music, celebratory songs, pop/rock standards, and novelties into one seamless whole, there's no better choice than this three-CD collection, which has been a mail-order monster for ages now, but is also available on the net. Since Time-Life licenses more songs than Santa has presents, you get a vast array of classic selections. Perhaps no other CD captures the true feel of the holiday like this one.

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3. [The Ventures, "The Ventures Christmas Album"](#)

Surf-rock's finest interpretive moment performed by rock's all-time greatest instrumentalists. Each song starts out as a classic mid-Sixties rock song and turns into a Christmas favorite before your very eyes. Hearing the Ventures own "Walk, Don't Run" morphing into "Jingle Bells" is one of life's great pleasures. Ditto for the Beatles' "I Feel Fine" transforming into "Frosty The Snowman." And "Wooly Bully" revealing itself as "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town." And... well, you get the idea.

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4. [The Vince Guaraldi Trio, "A Charlie Brown Christmas"](#)

You don't have to be a fan of the legendary Peanuts comic strip -- or of jazz music in general -- to enjoy this delicate soundtrack to the perennial Christmas TV special. Guaraldi, who made his name with a version of "Cast Your Fate To The Wind," performs similar quiet yet intense miracles on standards like "What Child Is This" and "The Christmas Song." Sixties piano jazz gets no more ethereal and windswept; this album sounds like snow falling feels. And yes, it's the one with "Linus and Lucy."

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5. [Elvis Presley, "Elvis' Christmas Album"](#)

It's perhaps too easy to include the King on a list like this, but he definitely earns his spot with this quintessential Fifties holiday celebration. The album splits the difference between the sacred and secular perfectly; it's festive in the first half, including his seasonal staple "Blue Christmas," then, predictably for Presley, turns more somber and spiritual (yet not particularly Christmas-oriented). But since he was arguably the greatest white gospel singer of all time, no one ever minds.

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6. [Charles Brown, "Please Come Home For Christmas"](#)

Holiday depression aside, the blues were not largely considered a Christmasy music until Charles Brown came along. One of the finest examples of West Coast blues, and a rare good example of basing an entire album around a hit single (the title track). That song has been covered in numerous, increasingly soulless attempts, but it's the original version that's by far the best, and the other cuts here are just as good, including another oft-covered seasonal gem from Brown, "Merry Christmas Baby."

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7. [Various Artists, "Soulful Christmas"](#)

This Time-Life offering isn't perfect by any means -- you don't get James Brown's "Santa Claus Go Straight To The Ghetto," for example --but it does represent the best-yet collection of R&B Christmas classics spanning the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies, including Otis' version of "Merry Christmas Baby," Donny Hathaway's "This Christmas," Booker T. and the M.G.s' "Jingle Bells," and The Drifters' now-obligatory version of "White Christmas." Beware of similarly-named imitations!

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8. [Various Artists, "Reggae Christmas From Studio One"](#)

A reggae Christmas sounds odd at first, especially since many acknowledged Yuletide perennials evoke images of snow, not island balminess. However, this excellent collection of early-Sixties ska and rock steady is one of the most joyously danceable and unavoidably festive Christmas CDs you'll ever own. Worth it just for lost classics like Bob Marley and the Wailers' "Sound The Trumpet," which incorporates "Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town" in the bridge. Perfect for parties!

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9. [Various Artists, "Dr. Demento Presents The Greatest Christmas Novelty CD..."](#)

...of all time, that is. And this one is just what it claims to be, too. Christmas pop songs are novelties almost by definition, since they're only relevant for about a month out of the year, and this collection of great comedy Xmas records by the foremost authority on wackiness covers everything from "The Chipmunk Song (Christmas Don't Be Late)" to Cheech and Chong's "Santa Claus and His Old Lady," touching upon all the greats in between (Allan Sherman, "Weird" Al Yankovic, Spike Jones).

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10. [Merle Haggard, "A Christmas Present"](#)

Country's finest Christmas album and a present from one of its most idiosyncratic artists, this collection of Haggard originals is haggard indeed, detailing a blue-collar holiday in a way few other classic C&W albums could. "If We Make It Through December" was the hit, and it's a fitting introduction to this bleak but honest song cycle. There are enough moments of traditional cheer, however ("Silver Bells"), to make this a thoughtful, not depressing, experience. Play this when it's all over.

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