

Some holiday songs will *never* get old

Howard Reich
Chicago Tribune

Why do we love Christmas music?

We know all the obvious reasons. It conjures treasured memories of holidays past; it allows us to revel in the season's spirit simply by listening; it gives us a sense of peace through familiarity — we've heard these songs a thousand times before.

But there's another reason we cling to songs such as "White Christmas," "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" and "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year": The character of the music itself conveys comfort and joy.

Meaning that even apart from the lyrics, the songs' melodies and harmonies — and the way performers deliver them — mostly have been designed either to put us at ease or to uplift us. The music does this every bit as much as the words, if not more so.

Think of the most ubiquitous and beloved of all holiday songs, Irving Berlin's "White Christmas." It may seem unlikely that a Russian-Jewish immigrant who was born Israel Isidore Baline would pen the song that epitomizes Christmas in America (and beyond). But Berlin, who essentially created the template for the Great American Songbook, knew exactly what he was doing.

The song's yearning harmonies and gradually ascending, aspirational melody express a sense of longing — which is quickly resolved. Thanks to the music, we feel the desire of the song's protagonist, who's "dreaming of a White Christmas."

That dream is realized by the song's end, if not by the lyrics then by the music, which ends sweetly.

And whose recording of "White Christmas" long ago became the standard against which all others are compared? Bing Crosby's, of course, his luxuriant baritone and ultra-relaxed delivery epitomizing



Bing Crosby's recording of "White Christmas" (the favorite holiday song of many locals, as shown on page 2) has become the standard against which all others are compared. The song was featured in the 1954 film of the same name, costarring Crosby and Danny Kaye, but it actually debuted in 1942's "Holiday Inn," another Crosby film, this time with Fred Astaire.

everything warm and comforting about the holidays. The lilting melodic embellishments with which he dresses up the melody are like ornaments glistening on a Christmas tree, brightening an already delightful experience.

Or take the endearing sentiments of Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane's "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," another holiday standard. The song's simplicity echoes Berlin's "White Christmas," but tinged with passing, minor-key chords as the lyrics envision a time when "our troubles will be out of sight."

More bittersweet than Berlin's classic, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" allows for the pain that sometimes accompanies the holiday season, even as the song ends with a message of hope.

Here, too, the tune's most well-known rendition tells us something, for who better than Judy Garland to capture the darkness stirring beneath the surface? She famously sang it in the 1944 film musical "Meet Me in St. Louis,"

itself a nostalgic look back at a seemingly more innocent time (the turn of the previous century). Sweetness and foreboding intermingle in "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," which tells us that "through the years we all will be together if the fates allow." The genius of this song lies in the way both the music and lyrics articulate a wish that all will be well, while acknowledging that danger always lurks.

Which is not to say that every classic Christmas song taps into our complicated dreams for the

holidays. Others take a different approach, the songwriters instead seeking to stir optimism, cheer and euphoria. The buoyant rhythms of Meredith Willson's "It's Beginning to Look (a Lot) Like Christmas," for instance, quicken our pulse not only because of the sprightly tempo the song demands but also because of its constant shifting between what musicians call "duple" and "triple" rhythms — dividing the beat by two or three.

This back-and-forth rhythmic tension gives the music an irresistibly bouncy quality, as if we were

jubilantly skipping through the season.

Similarly, there's energy to spare in James Brown's recording of "Santa's Got a Brand New Bag," which adds a welcome touch of funk to the holiday equation. And though Donny Hathaway's landmark "This Christmas" unfurls in long and soulful melody lines, there's no mistaking the rhythmic pulse that pushes it ever forward. Along these lines, the sassy swing of "Santa Baby," as sung by Eartha Kitt, reminds us that Christmas music can be saucy, too.

Oregon has one of the highest rates of misuse of prescription opioids in the nation.

The Center for Human Development, Inc., Medications for Addiction Treatment Program (MAT) offers hope and healing to individuals and families suffering from Opioid Use Disorder. Our team of certified drug and alcohol counselors, licensed medical providers, and certified recovery mentors help treat opioid addiction through medication, counseling, and the support of family and friends.

If you or a loved one may be addicted to prescription pain meds, treatment is available.

CHD

541-562 -HOPE

WWW.CHDINC.ORG/MAT