

How to make a classical Christmas No.1



How to make a No.1 opera Christmas album © DWD Media Alamy Stock Photo

What's the recipe for a guaranteed Christmas No.1? Christopher Gillett is on hand to offer advice to anyone seeking to attempt this particular festive feat (though it'll help if your name is Domingo). Cue reindeer, snow-flurries, open fires, and opera singers behaving very badly.



Is there anything tackier than the classical celebrity Christmas album? That's a rhetorical question because the answer is, obviously, no.

Granted, it's sometimes difficult to get into the Yuletide spirit during August, when the recording sessions often take place. I seem to remember wearing shorts to record 'In the Bleak Midwinter' at the height of a Cambridge summer while a member of King's College Choir. Conversely, I also remember a freezing day in December when the men of the choir dashed down between carol services to Hatfield House. Costumed in blazers and boaters – even as the frost lay deep and crisp and even – we pretended to

be Yale students enjoying a jolly summer romp, all while filming a TV special on Cole Porter with Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé ('Steve and Eydie' were huge stars in America, but we'd never heard of them).

At least at King's we were never obliged by the recording company to make the sort of album that now seems to have become necessary to fill their Christmas stockings. The usual formula is to take one legit opera star and pair them with a succession of vocalists possessed of less impressive ability, but with inexplicable (to me at least) mass appeal. More often than not, the duettists never meet, the whole project being cobbled together with technical wizardry: a bargain-priced orchestra in eastern Europe puts down a backing track, a crossover starlet records her bits in one city, and the big star adds on their stuff in another, between performances of [Puccini \(/uk/learn/composers/giacomo-puccini\)](http://uk/learn/composers/giacomo-puccini) at the opera house.

And of course, every Christmas album has to have pictures of the title artist looking Christmassy – cue

fake snow, a pile of presents, a woolly hat and scarf – to create the illusion that Christmas for the in-demand opera singer is spent roasting his chestnuts by the home hearth. In fact, the chances are that it's spent in a hotel or aeroplane, miles from home.

Still, never one to pass up the opportunity to make a few bob, I'm thinking ahead to next Christmas and my own compilation of sure-fire hits, including:

- **Mariah Carey and [Jackie Evancho \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/why-it-is-wrong-to-let-children-sing-opera\)](/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/why-it-is-wrong-to-let-children-sing-opera)** duetting in 'O Mio Babbino Carol'.
- **Plácido Domingo (</uk/learn/artists/placido-domingo>)** and a choir of over 50 celebrities (i.e. everyone who has ever duetted with him in 'White Christmas') in 'Tutto Quello Che Voglio Per Natale è Tu' ('All I want for Christmas is you').
- **Renée Fleming (</uk/learn/artists/renee-fleming>)** singing 'Jingle Bells' accompanied by **Cameron Carpenter (</uk/features/interviews/artist-interviews/cameron-carpenter-maverick-organist-interview-2015>)**, with full canon and mortar effects.
- **Adele singing [Handel \(/uk/learn/composers/george-frideric-handel\)](/uk/learn/composers/george-frideric-handel)'s 'The Trumpet Shall Sound' with Donald Trump, trumpet.**
- **Jonas Kaufmann in Slade's classic 'Ich wünschte, es könnte jeden Tag Weihnachten sein!'**
- **The Coventry Carol, sung by Sting (vocals), with Sting (guitar), Sting (lute), Sting (theorbo), Sting (viola da gamba), Sting (organ), Sting (sackbutt), Sting (cello) and [Yo-Yo Ma \(/uk/learn/artists/yo-yo-ma\)](/uk/learn/artists/yo-yo-ma) (ocarina).**

Pre-order now to guarantee disappointment!

More opinion from [Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett\)](/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett):

- **[Nappies and nightmares: a singer's version of humiliation \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/nappies-and-nightmares-the-psychology-of-humiliation-for-singers-2015\)](/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/nappies-and-nightmares-the-psychology-of-humiliation-for-singers-2015)**
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- **[Offstage romance: how to survive a relationship born in the opera house \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/are-opera-relationships-doomed-famous-singer-couples-and-divorces-2015\)](/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/are-opera-relationships-doomed-famous-singer-couples-and-divorces-2015)**
- **[Sexism and the casting couch in opera: does it still exist? \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/sexism-sexual-harrasment-casting-couch-in-opera-2015\)](/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/sexism-sexual-harrasment-casting-couch-in-opera-2015)**

Read more of Christopher's musings on his blog, christophergillett.co.uk (<http://christophergillett.co.uk/>).

Recommended





**The Three Tenors
Christmas**

Plácido Domingo,
Luciano Pavarotti, José
Carreras, Steven

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My Christmas

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Christmas In New York

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Marsalis, Gregory Porter,
Kelli O'Hara, Chris Botti,

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