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WHAT DON'T YOU KNOW ABOUT HOLIDAY MUSIC?

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Holiday music grows in popularity each year, and it's rooted in what many consider to be the classic era of the genre, the 1950s and 1960s. For many Americans, simply hearing those timeless versions of some of the most popular holiday songs is enough to set the mood each year. But despite that enduring demand for the classics, there is a lot about holiday music that you probably don't know, and we found some commonly held myths that are quite easy to dispel by combining Nielsen's portable people meter (PPM) radio trends on the [all-Christmas format](#) along with airplay, sales and streaming data for holiday songs, and insights into holiday music fans themselves.

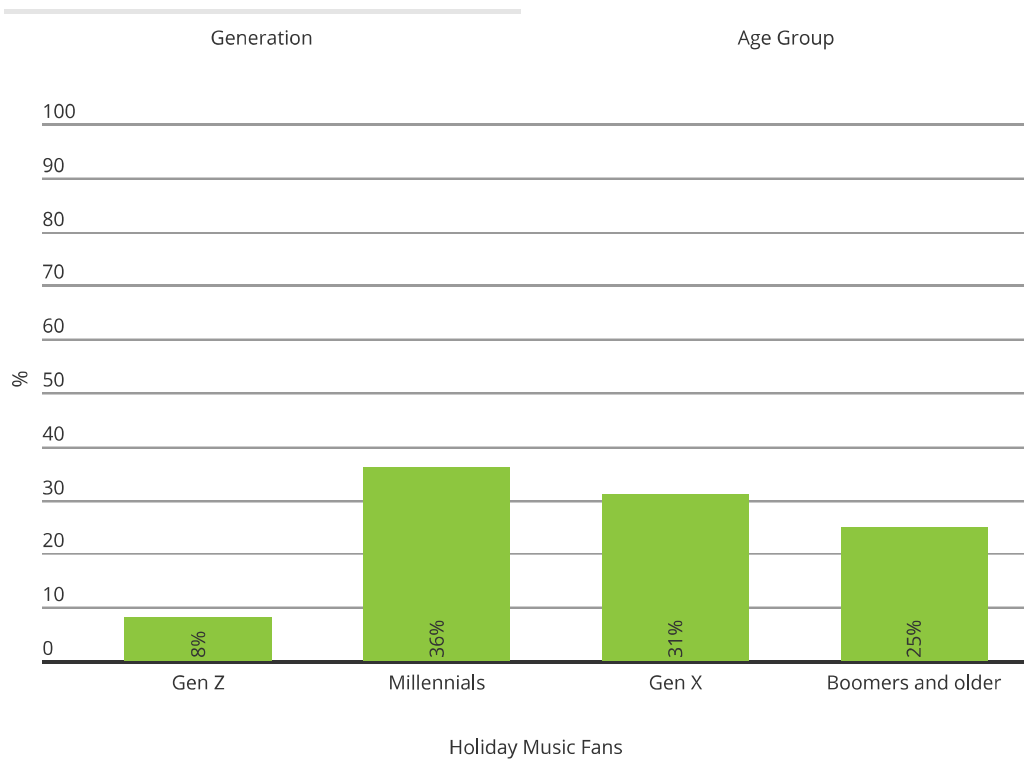
First up, the myth that because the classics endure, only older people must like holiday music. Nielsen's [Music 360 report](#) is a yearly in-depth study of American music consumers which allows us to focus on those who noted that they often listen to holiday music—the holiday music fan. Their profile might surprise you: More than a third of holiday music fans are Millennials... the largest of any generation.

<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2017/what-dont-you-know-about-holiday-music.html>

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MYTH: ONLY OLDER PEOPLE LIKE HOLIDAY MUSIC

Holiday music appeals to all listeners, including Millennials

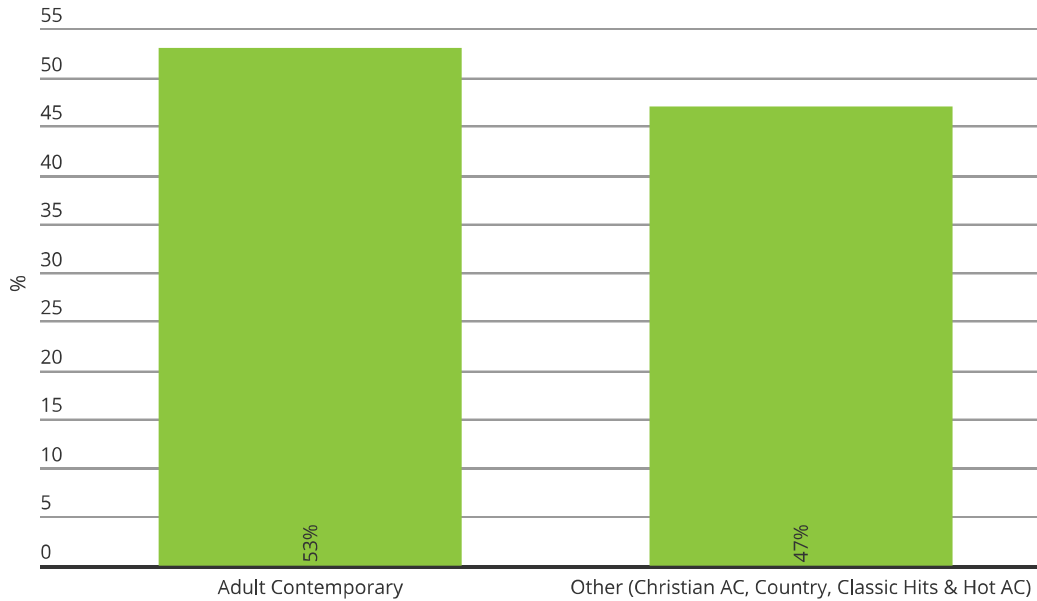


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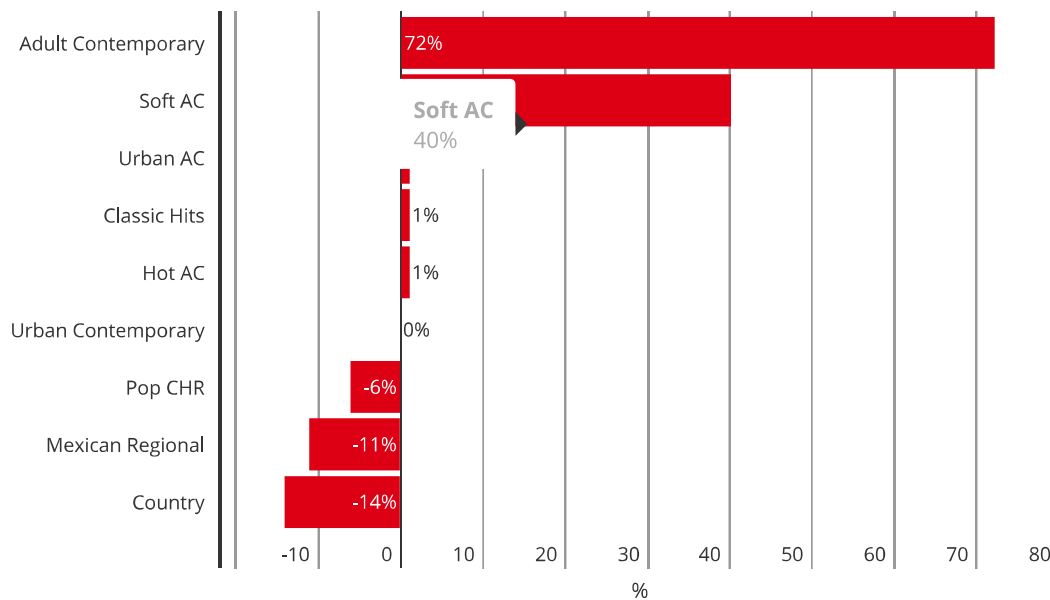
Over the next few weeks, hundreds of radio stations nationwide will be making the annual seasonal switch to the all-Christmas format. In each of the past few years, more than 500 stations have gone to holiday programming on or around Thanksgiving, and in many markets, Adult Contemporary (AC) stations are the obvious choices to make the flip. But, this format is not the exclusive domain of AC radio. In 2016, AC stations accounted for just over half of the airplay of all holiday music (53%), while the remaining 47% came from a combination of other popular formats, including Country, Classic Hits and even Hot AC.

MYTH: HOLIDAY MUSIC ONLY MATTERS FOR AC STATIONS

2016 radio airplay by format



Percent change in share during holiday months (five-year trend)



AC--Adult contemporary; CHR--Contemporary hit radio.

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When holiday programming hits the radio dial, things change. During the period between Thanksgiving and the New Year, when holiday stations see their largest spikes in audience, the mere presence of all-Christmas stations affect the radio habits for many other formats, too. In looking at an average of the past five years across PPM markets, it's clear that AC stations stand to gain the most during the holiday programming season, while tune-in across other formats don't budge, and still others (like Country) see listener declines.

Now, about those classics: To really get a handle on how holiday songs are consumed, we created some data tables based on the year a holiday song was recorded, and then plotted the raw tonnage of listener interaction by radio airplay, on-demand stream activity, and sales.

MYTH: PEOPLE ONLY WANT TO HEAR THE CLASSICS

Radio Airplay

On-Demand Streams

Sales

 Download data

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Take a close look at how the graphs differ between the three different types of consumption. Radio stations spread the wealth across the years, with a focus on both classic songs ('50s and '60s) along with more contemporary tracks. Streaming on-demand more heavily favors both the classics and the newest music (since 2010), while sales volume is entirely loaded on the current end of the graph. It's a fascinating look into how holiday music fans hear festive songs on the radio, what they choose to stream, and ultimately what they buy.

So this year, even though it's the thought that counts when spreading holiday cheer to listeners and consumers, don't assume that every holiday tradition will continue to go over well year after year. As the music landscape continues to shift, so do the ways in which Americans listen for the bright time and the right time to rock the night away.

Findings from this article were sourced from the Nielsen U.S. Music 360 Report, Nielsen BDSRadio and Music Connect, and Nielsen Audio PPM Market data.

Radio data used in this article is inclusive of multicultural audiences. Hispanic consumer audiences are composed of both English and Spanish-speaking representative populations.

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