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TOOTIN' SANTA**  
A **HILLBILLY** CHRISTMAS

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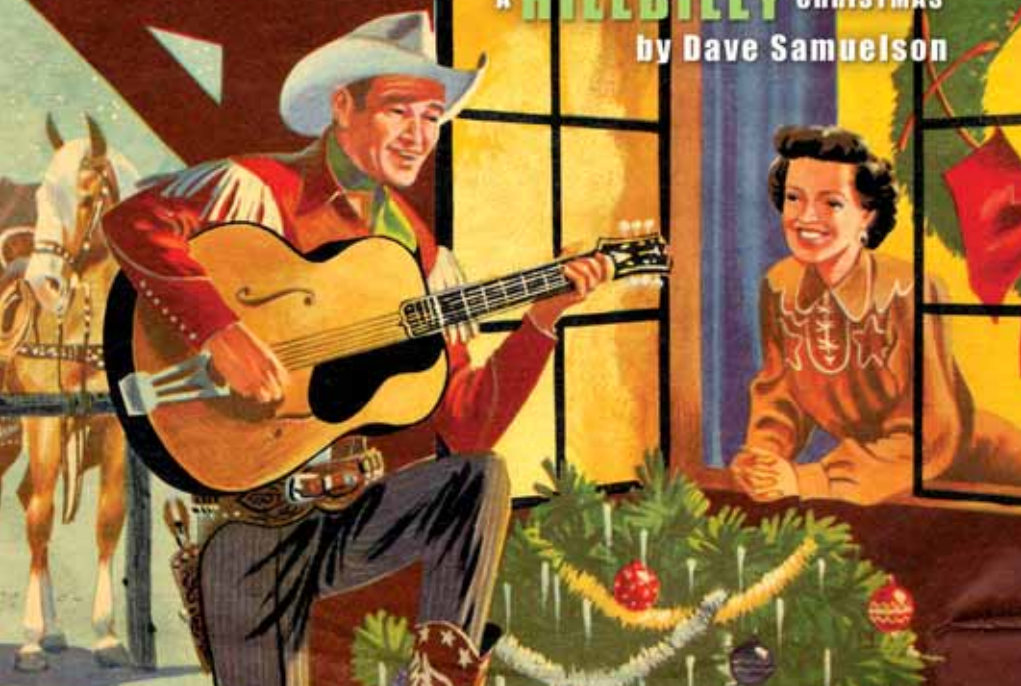


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# A ROOTIN' TOOTIN' SANTA

A **HILLBILLY** CHRISTMAS  
by Dave Samuelson



THESE 4 PAGES WILL SOLVE YOUR  
WARTIME CHRISTMAS GIFT PROBLEMS



There is just something about Santa Claus  
and his merry band of helpers that makes  
the holidays so special. And it's hard  
to think of a better gift than a record  
to celebrate the season. Here are some  
ideas for your "red-nosed" friends.

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Records who brings us the joy of the  
holidays. Victor Records has the  
best selection of records to give as  
gifts. Here are some ideas for your  
"red-nosed" friends.

# A ROOTIN' A HILLBILLY CHRISTMAS TOOTIN' SANTA

In the decades before streaming and digital downloads altered the recorded music landscape, record buyers were always eager to celebrate the holidays with fresh and familiar Christmas carols and seasonal songs.

While the first recordings of carols date back to 1902, Christmas music on record did not become a phenomenon until after World War II. As America worked its way out of the Great Depression of the 1930s, movies and radio were more important than records in introducing new Christmas songs. Listeners discovered “Winter Wonderland” through the radio. The first major Christmas hit on record was Bing Crosby’s 1935 coupling of “Silent Night” and “Adeste

Fideles.” That same year Victor paired Tommy Dorsey’s take on “Santa Claus Is Comin’ to Town” with rival bandleader Benny Goodman’s “Jingle Bells,” the latter arranged by Fletcher Henderson.

By comparison, Christmas recordings by country artists were virtually non-existent. In the late 1920s Okeh, Gennett and Paramount offered single couplings of traditional carols by obscure Southern gospel groups. Pioneering rural recording artist Fiddlin’ John Carson waxed a raucous “Christmas Time Will Soon Be Over” for Okeh in 1927. The following year New York songsmith Frank Luther recorded the morbid “Christmas Holds No Joy for Me” for Okeh under the name Harry Black. It’s doubtful

that any of these records were readily available after 1930.

Frank and James McCravy harmonized on “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear” and “Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem” on a 1930 Banner release. The Hoosier Hot Shots, a popular novelty quartet associated with NBC Radio’s *National Barn Dance*, recorded “Jingle Bells” in 1936, followed by “The Man with the Whiskers” in 1938. Sears, Roebuck & Co. later pressed both sides onto a Conqueror 78 for mail-order catalog sales. In 1940 Decca Records had Roy Rogers, a Sons of the Pioneers alumnus then starting his movie career, record “Silent Night” and “O Come All Ye Faithful,” essentially covering Bing Crosby’s earlier hit for a southwestern audience. In their 1993 book *Merry Christmas, Baby*, Dave Marsh and Steve Propes cite Rogers’ record as “the first example of country Christmas vocalizing.”

Then came Bing Crosby’s “White Christmas.” Written by Irving Berlin, Crosby introduced this melancholy standard

on his *Kraft Music Hall* radio show on Christmas Day, 1941 — eighteen days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He recorded the song in May 1942, three months before it appeared in *Holiday Inn*, a Paramount musical featuring Crosby and Fred Astaire. Decca included “White Christmas” in its *Holiday Inn* soundtrack album, but much to Crosby’s and Berlin’s dismay, it initially received a cool response from listeners. The song’s popularity unexpectedly snowballed among homesick American G.I.s stationed in distant wartime locales across the South Pacific and North Africa. Over time, “White Christmas” reportedly sold more than 50 million copies. “*White Christmas*’ changed Christmas music forever,” Marsh and Propes wrote, “both by revealing the huge potential market for Christmas songs and by establishing the themes of home and nostalgia that would run through Christmas music evermore.”

Songwriters responded to this emerging market with reflective ballads like Mel Tormé and Robert Wells’ “The Christmas Song” and such novelties as “All I Want for

Christmas (Is My Two Front Teeth)” and “Here Comes Santa Claus.” The microgroove LP that Columbia introduced in 1948 allowed labels to assemble thematic Christmas albums by its flagship popular artists.

All this happened as country and western music began its ‘golden age,’ emboldened by the rise of juke boxes, aggressive new independent labels and a stream of young rising talent. Admittedly, country music fans were slow in embracing the LP or even RCA Victor’s convenient 45 rpm singles. In fact, American labels released only four country Christmas albums between 1949 and 1955: Columbia’s 1949 anthology *Country Christmas Songs*; *Merry Christmas with Gene Autry* (Columbia); Jimmy Wakely’s *Christmas on the Range* (Capitol); and the Chuck Wagon Gang’s *Joy to the World* (Columbia). All appeared on 10-inch albums that were out of print by 1957. Tennessee Ernie Ford recorded his *A Star Carol* in 1958, but by then the singer abandoned his lively country approach to appeal to conservative mainstream audiences.

This collection offers a yuletide sampling of vintage country and western singles. Many of these tracks later appeared on compact disc, but usually in comprehensive, chronological box sets devoted to individual artists. Admittedly, a few significant early Nashville tracks are missing here: Bobby Helms’ 1957 “Jingle Bell Rock” and Brenda Lee’s 1958 “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree.” To be sure, they’re more country than rock-and-roll, but these seasonal favorites are readily available on numerous anthologies. Including them would mean deleting two lesser-known tracks that deserve to be heard and appreciated.





1.

**Bill Monroe**

## **Christmas Time's A-Comin'**

(Tex Logan)

recorded October 28, 1951 (20:00-23:00)  
Castle Studio at the Tulane Hotel, 206 8th

Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee;

Producer: Paul Cohen

with Bill Monroe: lead & tenor vocal/  
mandolin; Edd Mayfield: guitar; James Ora  
Bowers: banjo; Oscar 'Shorty' Sheehan: string  
bass; Gordon Terry: fiddle; Owen Bradley: vibes  
master NA 2521/81 801

**De 46386**

© 1951

The most enduring holiday song in bluegrass, “Christmas Time’s A-Comin’” was introduced by the style’s founding father, Bill Monroe (1911-1996). Benjamin “Tex” Logan (1927-2015), a Texas Tech electrical engineering student who played fiddle with Wilma Lee and Stony Cooper’s Clinch Mountain Clan, built the song around Fiddlin’ John Carson’s “Christmas Time Will Soon Be Over” and successfully pitched it to Monroe. Although Monroe invited him to play on the session, scheduling conflicts prevented Logan from making the date. Guitarist Edd Mayfield (1926-1958), who sings lead on the choruses, was a member of the Mayfield Brothers, the first bluegrass band in western Texas.

Monroe often acknowledged audience requests for “Christmas Time’s A-Comin’,” even during the sweltering heat of summer bluegrass festivals. He rerecorded the song in 1977, but that later version lacked the magic of his 1951 original. Today the song endures through covers by Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris, Sammy Kershaw and Patty Loveless.

2.

**Sonny James**

## **Christmas In My Hometown**

(John Skye-Sonny James)

recorded July 26, 1954 (Session: #3486)

Jim Beck Studio,

1914 Forest Avenue, Dallas, Texas;

Producer: Ken Nelson

with Sonny James: vocal/guitar; Neal Jones:  
rhythm guitar; Harland Powell: steel guitar;

Grundy ‘Slim’ Harbert: bass;

Eugene ‘Buddy’ Brady: fiddle;

poss. William ‘Bill’ Simmons: piano  
master 12877

**F 2968**

© 1954



Sonny James’s massive crossover hit “Young Love” was still two years in the future when the singer recorded this wistful Christmas ballad, co-written with John Polanski, a Dallas Salvation Army major who penned songs under the name John Skye.

Born James Dale Loden in Hackleberg, Alabama, in 1929, the youngster began his musical career with his family's band. After returning from service in the Korean War, James headed to Nashville, hoping Chet Atkins would consider placing his songs with an RCA Victor artist. Atkins was impressed by the singer's personality and warm tenor voice. Because RCA's country roster was full, Atkins encouraged Ken Nelson of Capitol Records to sign him.



Although “Young Love” brought James fame and a sizable audience, the label pushed the reluctant singer into more lavish pop productions. Leaving Capitol in 1959, he recorded for Bill Lowery's NRC label, RCA Victor and Dot with minimal success. Returning to Capitol in 1963, James forged a dynamic new sound that led to an impressive string of No. 1 country hits between 1967 and 1971.

“Christmas in My Hometown” is James's most enduring holiday song, generating covers by Bobby Vinton and Travis Tritt. He revisited the song for his 1966 Capitol album *My Christmas Dream*.

3.

## Tennessee Ernie Ford

### Christmas Dinner

(Tennessee Ernie Ford)

recorded April 5, 1951  
(Session: 2123: 21:10-00:10)

Capitol Studio,

5515 Melrose Ave. Hollywood, California  
with Tennessee Ernie Ford: vocal; Ivy J. 'Jimmy' Bryant: guitar; Edward M. 'Eddie' Kirk: guitar; Wesley Webb 'Speedy' West: steel guitar; Clifford G. 'Cliffie Stone' Snyder: bass/leader; Milton Curtis 'Muddy' Berry: drums; Harold Glenn Hensley: fiddle; William Edward 'Billy' Liebert: piano  
master 7403-11

F 1830

© 1951



Before he became a beloved fixture in American television in the mid-1950s, Tennessee Ernie Ford was best known for the novel country boogies he waxed for Capitol Records earlier in the decade.

A native of Bristol, Tennessee, Ernest Jennings Ford (1919-1991) took voice lessons at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music before World War II interrupted his studies. After his discharge from the Army Air Corps, Ford landed a staff announcing job with KFXM in San Bernardino, California. His on-air duties included hosting the station's daily country music show, so Ford developed his broad comic persona 'Tennessee Ernie.' Few listeners realized this loud, wise-cracking hillbilly was the same person who somberly reported the news during the day.

In 1947 Ford joined KXLA in Pasadena, where he continued to read the news and transform into 'The Ol' Pea Picker.' Cliffie Stone, who helmed the station's *Dinner Bell Round-Up*, invited Ford to sing in the show's gospel quartet. Much to Stone's delight, Ford inevitably unleashed Tennessee Ernie in the studio, leaving audiences in stitches and capturing the attention of Capitol Records' Lee Gillette.

Backed by KXLA's razor-sharp studio band, Tennessee Ernie's lively Capitol releases reached record buyers far beyond the singer's California base. In 1953 he was invited to

sing at London's Paladium Theater. "Christmas Dinner," a peppy Ford original describing a yuletide feast, unexpectedly ends with a reverent close-harmony blessing from the Hometown Quartet: Ford, Harold Hensley, Eddie Kirk and Speedy West.

4.

## George Jones Maybe Next Christmas

(George Jones-Lester Blackwell)

recorded August 1957; Gold Star Recording Studio, 5628 Brock St., Houston, Texas;

Producer: H.W. 'Pappy' Daily;

Engineer: Bill Quinn

with George Jones: vocal/guitar;

poss. Earl Aycock: rhythm guitar; Harold F. 'Hal' Harris: lead guitar; Frank Juricek: steel guitar; prob. Hezzie Bryant: bass;

Ernest D. 'Ernie' Hunter: fiddle;

Charles 'Doc' Lewis: piano

master 2639/YW 15007

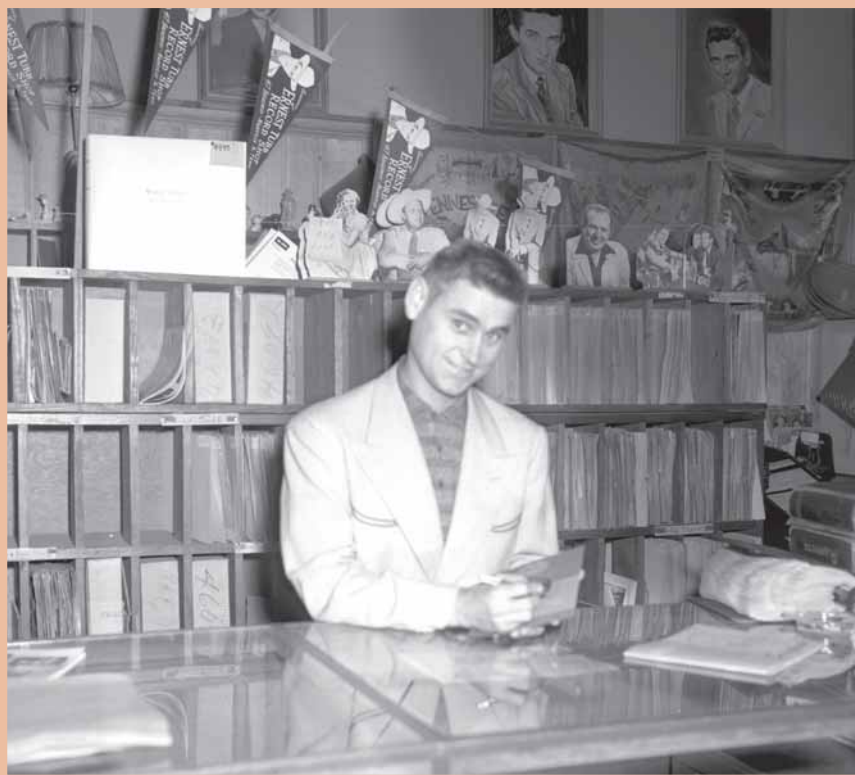
**D 1226/Me 71225**

© 1957

Hailing from the 'Big Thicket' region of east Texas, George Jones (1931-2013) was

approaching his youthful peak when he recorded "Maybe Next Christmas." He wrote the song during early summer 1957 with Lester Lee Blackwell, a Norwalk, California, writer who also penned material with Jimmy Wakely and Johnny Bond.

Despite his records garnering significant chart action and radio airplay, this was a difficult period for Jones, who tirelessly worked the brutal roadhouse circuit for little pay. Now assigned to Mercury Records, he was also caught in an acrimonious battle between his producer, Harold 'Pappy' Daily, and Don Pierce of Starday Records. "Maybe Next Christmas" was simultaneously released on Mercury and as a promotional item on Pierce's custom imprint, Dixie Records. Pierce shipped his pressings to Stewart Sales, a Chicago operation that packaged hillbilly records for sale over late-night radio stations. Stewart Sales gave the Jones records to its customers as Christmas gifts, a strategy that annoyed Daily and Mercury executives. Those elusive Dixie pressings are now prized collectors' items.



5.

**Roy Rogers**  
**Silent Night, Holy Night**

(Franz Gruber; PD)

recorded September 3, 1940,

Los Angeles, California

with Roy Rogers: vocal; with Jimmy Wakely's Rough Riders: Dick Reinhart: guitar/vocal trio; Jimmy Wakely: guitar/vocal trio; unknown: electric steel guitar; Johnny Bond: string bass/vocal trio; possibly Spade Cooley: fiddle; possibly Carl Cotner: fiddle  
master DLA 2110-A

**De 5883**

© 1940



At the time of this session, Roy Rogers (1911-1998) spent the last three years in a whirlwind. The Ohio native left the Sons of

the Pioneers, changed his name, launched a solo recording career and signed a movie contract with Republic Pictures.

Born Leonard Slye in Cincinnati, Ohio, he became proficient on guitar and began singing locally with his cousin, Stanley Slye. In 1929 the Slye family moved to southern California, where Rogers met Bob Nolan and Tim Spencer. Forming the Pioneer Trio in 1933, they applied close harmony vocals on vintage songs and atmospheric Nolan originals. When instrumental wizards Hugh and Karl Farr joined the group in 1934, they became The Sons of the Pioneers.

Rogers signed with Vocalion Records in early 1938, primarily recording with small studio ensembles. Jumping to Decca in 1940, Rogers was often backed by members of Spade Cooley's band. Rogers recorded "Silent Night, Holy Night" with the Jimmy Wakely Trio, which included Wakely and Dick Reinhardt on guitars and Johnny Bond on bass. As noted earlier, Dave Marsh and Jeff Propes cited this as the first country Christmas record. While that claim may be disputed, the record remains the earliest track on this anthology.

6.

## **Ernest Tubb** **White Christmas**

(Irving Berlin)

recorded August 26, 1949 (14:30-17:30)  
Castle Studio at the Tulane Hotel, 206 8th  
Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee;

Producer: Paul Cohen

Ernest Tubb: vocal; Herbert M. 'Butterball'  
Tommy' Paige: electric lead guitar; Loren

Otis 'Jack' Shook: rhythm guitar;

unidentified: steel guitar; Jack Drake: bass;  
Owen Bradley: organ; Three Troubadettes  
(Evelyn Wilson, Alcyone Bate Beasley &  
Anita Kerr or Dottie Dillard): vocal chorus  
master NA 2028/75219

**De 46186**

© 1949

Gifted with a dry, rough-hewn baritone and a charismatic personality, Ernest Tubb (1914-1984) is often cited as the father of modern country music. Born in northeastern Texas, Tubb was a devoted disciple of Jimmie

Rodgers; the singer's widow helped Tubb land his first recording contract. By 1940 he matured into a distinctive singer-songwriter, penning honky-tonk hits about once-taboo themes as drinking, divorces, and damaged lives. With their strong electric guitar leads, Tubb's Decca records became juke-box favorites across the southern and western United States and later found a devoted audiences among homesick G.I.s during World War II. In 1943 Tubb became a cast member of *The Grand Ole Opry*, an association that lasted until his death.

Not surprisingly, Decca Records wanted a country cover of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" to complement its pop release by Bing Crosby. Tubb tackled the song during an August 1947 session with steel guitarist Jerry Byrd. The label shelved Tubb and Byrd's sincere, understated reading, hoping for something with more pop crossover potential. Because a Musician's Union recording ban was in effect through 1948, Tubb couldn't return to the song until August 1949. Although Paul Cohen was the credited producer, the overall production reflects the upscale vision of Owen Bradley, who played organ on the date. Tubb's record became a double-sided *Billboard* country hit; "White Christmas" reached No. 7, while its 'B'-side, "Blue Christmas," hit No. 1.



Ernest Tubb and Blue Eyed Elaine

7.

## Wesley Tuttle Christmas Carols By The Old Corral

(Johnny Lange-Archie Gottler)

recorded January 15, 1946  
(Session: #T-106; 4 hours) Radio  
Recorders, 7000 Santa Monica Boulevard,  
Hollywood 38, California; Producer: Lee  
Gillette

with Wesley Tuttle and his Texas Stars:  
Wesley L. Tuttle: vocal/guitar/leader; Jack  
Rivers Lewis: guitar; Don Weston: guitar;  
Phil F. Marx Jr: steel guitar; Allen J.  
Williams: bass; Robert W. 'Bob'  
Conzelman: drums; Margie Ann "Fiddlin'  
Kate" De Vere: fiddle; Charles Emery  
Linville: fiddle; Paul L. Sells: accordion  
master ET 617-2

**G 19-3**

© 1946



“Christmas Carols by the Old Corral” was penned by Hollywood songwriters Johnny Lange (1905-2006) and Archie Gottler (1896-1958). Lange, a Philadelphia native, began his Hollywood career in 1937, primarily

specializing in songs for ‘B’ westerns. His best-known songs are “I Left My Sugar in Salt Lake City,” “Somebody Bigger Than You or I,” and the 1949 hit “Mule Train.” His daughter is actress Hope Lange.

Archie Gottler was a New Yorker who composed material for the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1918* and other revues before moving to Los Angeles, when the talkies created new opportunities for songwriters. He also directed “Woman Haters,” the Three

Stooges’ first Columbia short.

Tex Ritter recorded “Christmas Carols by the

Old Corral” at a July 1945 session for Capitol Records. Paired with “You Will Have to Pay (For Your Yesterday)” the record became a double-sided hit that December.

Even though the Christmas season recently ended, Capitol asked Wesley Tuttle (1917-2003) to cover the song for its transcription service. Originally from Colorado, Tuttle sang over San Fernando radio stations will still in his teens. After a brief stint on WLW in Cincinnati, he returned to California and

signed with Capitol. His second release, Paul Howard’s song “With Tears in My Eyes,” spent fourteen weeks on *Billboard’s* country chart in 1945, including four weeks at No. 1.

Tuttle remained with Capitol until 1955, his days as a hit-maker fading as his smooth California sound gave way to edgier honky-tonk styles. He left music in 1957 to become an evangelist.

8.

**Bill Haley**

## A Year Ago This Christmas

(Bill Haley)

recorded October 1951, Chester, Pennsylvania

with Bill Haley and the Saddlemen: Bill Haley: vocal/rhythm guitar; Danny Cedrone: lead guitar; Billy Williamson: steel guitar; Marshall Lytle: double bass; Johnny Grande: piano

**Holiday 111**

© 1951





“A Year Ago This Christmas” is a pleasant ballad, but nothing about this record even remotely suggests the enormous impact Bill Haley (1925-1981) and his band would later have on popular music.

Born in Detroit and raised outside of Philadelphia, Bill Haley was inspired by Gene Autry and other singing cowboys of the late 1930s. Learning the guitar and mastering a yodel, he began entertaining at a local farmers’ market. In 1944 Haley was in Fort Wayne, Indiana, working with the Down Homers on WOWO. Eager to lead his own band, Haley formed the Range Drifters.

After a brief period in New England, Haley returned to eastern Pennsylvania in late 1947. The following summer he made his first records for Jack Howard’s Cowboy label. In spring 1951, Dave Miller, owner of the Holiday and Essex labels, gave Howard a copy of Jackie Brenston’s new Chess release “Rocket 88.” Sensing a possible hit, Miller wanted Haley’s band to cover it for Holiday. Recorded that June, Haley’s lively version was a quantum leap over his earlier pedestrian output; many cite it as the first rock-and-roll record.

Failing to grasp the bigger picture, Haley continued to record conventional country fare, including this Christmas single. Six months later Haley and his Saddlemen cranked up the volume and waxed “Rock the Joint,” originally a 1949 R&B hit for Jimmy Preston. By

November the Saddlemen became the Comets, and Haley's aggressive musical hybrid permanently altered the popular music landscape.

9.

## George Jones

### New Baby For Christmas

(George Jones-Lester Blackwell)

recorded August 1957; Gold Star Recording Studio, 5628 Brock St., Houston, Texas;

Producer: H.W. 'Pappy' Daily;

Engineer: Bill Quinn

with George Jones: vocal/guitar; poss. Earl

Aycock: rhythm guitar; Harold F. 'Hal'

Harris: lead guitar; Frank Juricek: steel guitar; prob. Hezzie Bryant: bass;

Ernest D. 'Ernie' Hunter: fiddle;

Charles 'Doc' Lewis: piano

master 2640/YW 15007

**D 1226/Me 71225**

© 1957

The livelier side of George Jones's 1957 Christmas release, "New Baby for Christmas" was also a joint composition



by Jones and Lester Lee Blackwell. Johnny Preston recorded a pop-oriented arrangement for Mercury in 1960.

During the brief period between the 1961 expiration of Jones's Mercury contract and the 1962 start of his United Artists pact, Pappy Daily reissued "New Baby for Christmas" and "Maybe Next Christmas" on his 'D' label, primarily for distribution in Texas.

10.

## Jimmy Heap

### My Angel Isn't On My Christmas Tree

(C. R. Harris)

recorded 1949,

KTAE Radio Station, Taylor, Texas  
with Houston 'Perk' Williams: vocal/fiddle;

Jimmy Heap: vocal/lead guitar;

Horace Barnett: rhythm guitar; Cecil R.  
'Butterball' Harris: steel guitar;

Bill Glendening: bass

master IF 173

**Imp 8133**

© 1949

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Jimmy Heap and the Melody Masters ruled central Texas dance halls with a solid backbeat and original songs.

Hailing from Taylor, Texas, Jimmy Heap (1922-1977) organized the Melody Makers in 1947 after military service. Originally patterned after Bob Wills' Texas Playboys, the group had a local hit with "Dessau Waltz" on a small Austin label. When fiddler Louis Rencon left the band, Heap hired Houston 'Perk' Williams to replace him. Heap, who previously did most of the singing, encouraged Williams to handle the band's vocal chores.

In 1949 Heap signed with Lew Chudd's new Imperial label. Instead of travelling to Los Angeles for sessions, Heap recorded at KTAE in Taylor and shipped the masters to Chudd. Heap's first Imperial session included "My Angel Isn't on My Christmas Tree," written by his steel player 'Butterball' Harris. In 1951 Heap and Williams recorded "The Wild Side of Life,"



but their original version was hampered by Imperial's limited distribution. After the latter record ran its course, Heap offered the song to Hank Thompson, whose version clung to the top of *Billboard's* country charts for fifteen weeks. Through Thompson's efforts, Heap and Williams jumped to Capitol, where they recorded their only chart hit, "Release Me."

After Williams left the Melody Makers in 1957, Heap flirted with rock-and-roll and other styles. The group evolved into a showband, mixing comedy and music at Texas clubs and in Las Vegas lounges. Heap disbanded the group shortly before his 1977 death in a boating accident.

11.

**Ernest Tubb**  
**Blue Christmas**

(Billy Hayes-Jay Johnson)

recorded August 26, 1949 (14:30-17:30) Castle Studio at the Tulane Hotel, 206 8th Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee; Producer: Paul Cohen with Ernest Tubb: vocal; Herbert M. 'Butterball' Tommy' Paige: electric lead guitar; Loren Otis 'Jack' Shook: rhythm guitar; Unidentified: steel guitar; Jack Drake: bass; Owen Bradley: organ; Three Troubadettes (Evelyn Wilson, Alcyone Bate Beasley & Anita Kerr or Dottie Dillard): vocal chorus

master NA 2029/75220

**De 46186**

© 1949



If Elvis Presley hadn't covered "Blue Christmas" in 1957, chances are this song about unrequited love would not be the holiday classic that it is today.

Presley possibly learned "Blue Christmas" from Ernest Tubb's 1949 record, which itself was a cover. Doye O'Dell, a Texas singer based in Los Angeles, first recorded Billy Hayes and Jay Johnson's song for Leon René's Exclusive Records. Released in 1948, O'Dell's record caught the attention of other labels but that year's union recording ban made it impossible for other labels to release competing versions.

Once the ban was lifted, Tubb recorded "Blue Christmas" at the session that produced his released version of "White Christmas." The pop versions Russ Morgan recorded for Decca and Hugo Winterhalter for Columbia both entered *Billboard's Best-Selling Singles* chart in 1949. The following year Billy Eckstine cut a lush arrangement for M-G-M.

Thanks to Presley's record, "Blue Christmas" is cited as the fifteenth most-performed Christmas song of all-time.

12.

## **Davis Sisters** **Christmas Boogie**

(Cy Coben)

recorded August 17, 1954 (14:00-17:00)

RCA Victor Studio 1, New York City;

Producer: Stephen H. Sholes  
with Georgie Davis: vocal; Mary Frances  
'Skeeter Davis' Penick: vocal; Chester B.

'Chet' Atkins: electric guitar; George  
Barnes: electric guitar; Billy Mure: rhythm  
guitar; Herb Johnson: steel guitar; Charles  
R. Grean: bass/leader; Phil Kraus: drums;  
Mac Ceppos: fiddle; 'Shorty' Long: fiddle;

Marty Gold: piano  
master E4VB 4966

**20-5906**

© 1954

"Christmas Boogie" was recorded by the second incarnation of the Davis Sisters, who were actually unrelated. The first incarnation



Skeeter & Georgie

was Mary Francis “Skeeter” Penick and Betty Jack Davis, who began singing together while attending Dixie Heights High School in Covington, Kentucky. Betty Jack was already a promising country vocalist, occasionally appearing on *The Renfro Valley Barn Dance*. Impressed by Skeeter’s ability to harmonize, Betty Jack invited her to join

her on the popular radio show. During an appearance on a Cincinnati television station, an announcer introduced them as “The Davis Sisters” and the name stuck.

In 1951 the girls joined *The Big Barn Frolic* on WJR in Detroit. The following year they made their first records for Fortune, backed by members of the Lonesome Pine Fiddlers. Signing with RCA Victor in 1953, the Davis Sisters’ first record, “I’ll Forget More Than You’ll Ever Know,” hit No. 1 on Billboard’s country chart. While on tour promoting the record, the women were involved in a head-on collision outside of Cincinnati. Betty Jack was killed instantly and Skeeter was seriously injured.

After her recovery, Skeeter began singing with Betty Jack’s older sister, Georgie. They worked together for the next three years, but the chemistry was not the same and the hits never materialized. Chet Atkins encouraged Skeeter to work as a soloist, enhancing her recorded vocals with overdubbed harmonies. In 1962 she scored a crossover hit with “The End of the World.”

“Christmas Boogie” was written by Cy Coben (1919-2006), a prolific New York songwriter whose compositions include “The Old Piano Roll Blues” and “A Good Woman’s Love.”

13.

## **Billy Briggs with String Band** **North Pole Boogie**

(Billy Briggs)

recorded October 1951, Amarillo, Texas  
with Billy Briggs: vocal/steel guitar;

Jesse Williams: rhythm guitar;

George Weldon Allard: bass.

master IF 310

**Imp 8131**

© 1951

With a career dating back to the mid-thirties, Billy Briggs (1919-1984) is best-known for “Chew Tobacco Rag” and other novelties he recorded in the early fifties. The son of a Fort Worth attorney, Briggs learned to play steel guitar from Bob Dunn, a former member of Milton Brown’s

Musical Brownies. Building his own nine-string steel, he made his first recordings with the Hi-Fliers in 1937. The following year he moved to Amarillo to work with the Sons of the West.

In 1946 Briggs formed the XIT Boys, named after a massive 19th-century ranch that spanned across the west Texas panhandle. Originally a full-sized western swing ensemble, he later trimmed the band to a trio. With Briggs on sax and steel, Jesse Williams on guitar and Weldon Allard on bass, the group began a lengthy residency at Amarillo’s Avalon Club. Legendary alto



sax player Ornette Coleman remembered jamming with the XIT Boys when he lived in Amarillo. In 1956 Briggs disbanded the group and moved to California.

“North Pole Boogie” was a lively Briggs original played in a minor key — an unorthodox setting for a boogie woogie.

14.

**Terry Fell**

**Let's Stay Together  
Till After Christmas**

(Terry Fell)

recorded August 20, 1954 (14:00-17:00)  
Radio Recorders, Studio A, 7000 Santa  
Monica Blvd. Hollywood 38, California;

Producer: Joe Hilliard

with Terry Fell: vocal/guitar/leader; Otis  
'Joe' Maphis: guitar; Ralph Mooney: steel  
guitar; Al Barker: bass; Margie Ann De Vere

Warren: fiddle; Lester Taylor: piano  
master E4LB-4458

**X-0069**

© 1954



Terry Fell (1921-2007) is better known today as a songwriter than as a vocalist, primarily for “Truck Drivin’ Man,” the flip side of his sole chart hit, “Don’t Drop It.”

Born and raised in northwestern Alabama, Fell learned to play guitar and mandolin at an early age. With his family hard hit by the Great Depression, he bummed a ride to California, taking jobs where he could find them. In 1940 he was working at a Los Angeles tire plant and playing bass for Merl Lindsey on weekends. By 1945 he started placing songs with American Music and recording for small labels, eventually landing a contract with Bill McCall's 4-Star Records. His songwriting demos caught the attention of Jimmy Hilliard of RCA Victor, who signed Fell to RCA's new "X" label. "Let's Stay Together Till After Christmas" was cut at Fell's second "X" session, backed by musicians from KTTV's *Town Hall Party*.

Never comfortable as a performer, Fell moved into management and promotion. He also produced Buck Owens' early sessions for Pep Records. Moving to Nashville in 1962, he worked as a publisher's representative before his retirement.

15.

**Bob Wills**

**When It's**

**Christmas On The Range**

(Dave Denny-Perry Ward)

recorded May 7, 1949 (12:00-15:00) Radio  
Recorders, 7000 Santa Monica Boulevard,  
Hollywood 38, California;  
Producer: Irving Aaronson  
with James Robert 'Bob' Wills: fiddle/  
leader; H. O. 'Jack' Loyd: vocal/bass; Estel  
Eldon Shamblyn: electric guitar; Johnny  
Gimble: electric mandolin/fiddle; Billie M.  
'Tiny' Moore: electric mandolin/fiddle;  
Herbert L. 'Herb' Remington: steel guitar;  
Luther Jay 'Luke' Wills: bass; Felix Rale:  
percussion; Billy Jack Wills: drums; Charles  
R. 'Doc' Lewis: piano; William Ellsworth  
'Alex' Brashear: trumpet

master 49-S-3121

**MGM 10512**

© 1949



In May 1949 Bob Wills brought his Texas Playboys into Hollywood's Radio Recorders for his first sessions following the Musicians' Union recording ban. The band sported a different sound; eight months earlier Wills fired his long-time vocalist Tommy Duncan and deputized Jack Loyd as his new lead singer. Instrumentally, the band was as strong as ever with a line-up including trumpeter Alex Brashear, steel guitarist Herbie Remington and reliable rhythm guitarist Eldon Shamblin. Tiny Moore and newcomer Johnny Gimble shared double-duty on fiddles and electric mandolins. However, Wills's M-G-M material seldom matched the quality of his classic Columbia sides.

“When It’s Christmas on the Range” was written by Dave Denny and Perry Ward. A staff announcer with WLS in Chicago, Denny was an RCA Victor artist and occasional duet partner with Patsy Montana. Perry Ward was the announcer on Gene Autry’s *Melody Ranch*.

16.

**Ernest Tubb**  
**I'll Be Walkin' The Floor**  
**This Christmas**

(Ernest Tubb-Justin Tubb)

recorded October 29, 1954 (10:30-13:30)  
Bradley Studio, Hillsboro Road, Nashville,  
Tennessee; Producer: Paul Cohen  
with Ernest Tubb: vocal; William L. 'Billy'  
Byrd: electric lead guitar; unknown: rhythm  
guitar; Dickie Harris: steel guitar; Jack  
Drake: bass; Farris Coursey: drums; Owen  
Bradley: piano  
master NA 3391/86 989

**De 29350**

©1954



“I’ll Be Walkin’ the Floor This Christmas” was a melancholy original fusing the sentiment of “Blue Christmas” with the signature lick from Ernest Tubb’s breakout hit and theme song “Walking the Floor Over You.” The original label credited the song to Tubb and his 19-year-old son, Justin. However, it was actually written by the younger Tubb with his cousin, Douglas Glenn Tubb, who later recorded as “Glenn Douglas.” Douglas Tubb is best known for co-writing Johnny Cash’s “Home of the Blues” and Henson Cargill’s “Skip a Rope.”



17.

**George Jones**

## **My Mom And Santa Claus**

(Clyde Beavers)

recorded September 13, 1962, Columbia  
Recording Studio, 804 16th Avenue South,  
Nashville, Tennessee;

Producer: Pappy Daily  
with George Jones: vocal;  
other details unknown

master 4147

**UA 530**

© 1962

Capturing George Jones in his early-sixties novelty mode, “My Mom and Santa Claus” quotes and recalls “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus,” a No. 1 pop hit for 13-year-old Jimmy Boyd in 1952. The song was written by Clyde Beavers (1932-2015), an Atlanta-based singer and disc jockey. In 1957 he was managed by Pappy Daily, who placed his record of “Man in the Glass” with Mercury. Beavers scored a modest country hit in 1960 with “Here I Am (Drunk Again).” In later years he managed an audio/video service catering to churches and Christian musicians.

18.

**Gene Autry**  
**Rudolph,**  
**The Red Nosed Reindeer**

(Johnny Marks)

recorded June 27, 1949 (20:00-01:00)  
Radio Station KNX on Sunset & Gower,  
Hollywood, California  
with Gene Autry; vocal; Frankie J. Marvin:  
steel guitar/leader; John C. 'Johnny' Bond:  
guitar; Ed Skrivanik, guitar; John Bert  
Dodson: bass; Larry Taylor: drums; Bob  
Armstrong: piano; Carl Cotner: violin/arr;  
Louise Heising: violin; Mischa Russell:  
violin; Olcott Vail: violin; Andrew F. 'Andy'  
Secrest: trumpet; The Pinafores (Eunice  
Kettle, Beulah Kettle, Ione Kettle  
Weltmer): vocal chorus

**Co 38610**

© 1949

With as many 25 million copies sold, Gene Autry's "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" is the second-biggest-selling Christmas record of all-time, superseded only by Bing Crosby's "White Christmas."

The character was conceived in 1939 by Robert L. May, a copywriter for Montgomery Ward & Co. A Chicago-based mail-order giant, the company usually gave away coloring books to incentivize its Christmas catalog sales. For its 1939 campaign, May wrote a poem about an outcast reindeer whose glowing red nose helped guide Santa Claus and his sleigh during a foggy Christmas Eve night. Illustrated by Denver Gillen, the company gave away more than two million copies of the 32-page *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* booklet that first year.

The character's popularity grew throughout the forties, leading Montgomery Ward to commission an animated promotional short in 1948. That same year NBC announcer Paul Wing narrated May's poem for an RCA Victor children's album. In 1949 Johnny Marks, a New York songwriter married to Mays' sister, distilled and simplified the Rudolph saga into a catchy song. Paying singer Al Cernik five

dollars to cut a demo, Marks shipped copies to record labels and artist representatives. (Ironically, Cernik later became a successful pop stylist under the name Guy Mitchell.)



Exactly how Gene Autry came to record the song remains uncertain; in his 2016 book *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer: An American Hero*, Ronald D. Lankford, Jr. explores conflicting claims. Whatever the circumstances, Autry proved an ideal choice. Two years earlier the singing cowboy introduced another Christmas standard, “Here Comes Santa Claus,” written with Oakley Haldeman.

Columbia initially released “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” in its vinylite children’s record series, but its overwhelming sales figures quickly prompted a parallel pop release on more durable shellac. The record peaked at No. 1 on *Billboard’s* pop singles chart and continued its seasonal placements through 1952.

19.

## Red Foley & Judy Martin

### Our Christmas Waltz

(Steve Nelson-Ed. Nelson, Jr)

recorded August 23, 1949;

Castle Studio at the Tulane Hotel,  
206 8th Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee;

Producer: Paul Cohen

with Red Foley: vocal/contractor; Eva  
Alene Foley (Judy Martin): vocal; Thomas  
Grady Martin: guitar; Loren Otis 'Jack'  
Shook: guitar; Billy Robinson: steel guitar;

Ernest F. 'Ernie' Newton: bass;

Farris Coursey: drums;

William Owen Bradley: piano  
master NA 2009/75 192

De 46185

© 1949



Eva (Judy Martin), and Red with daughter Shirley

Although the husband-and-wife team of Red and Eva Foley had separate radio and recording careers dating back to 1933, they did not record together until 1946.

A native of Berea, Kentucky, Clyde 'Red' Foley (1910-1968) moved to Chicago in 1931 to join the Cumberland Ridge Runners on WLS's *National Barn Dance*. That same

year Eva Overstake (1918-1951) and her sisters Evelyn and Lucille joined the *Barn Dance* cast from WJBL in downstate Decatur. The couple married in August 1933, not long after Foley's first wife died in childbirth. Eva reluctantly put her career on hold to raise her step-daughter Betty and the couple's three daughters.

Red Foley leveraged his appearances on the *National Barn Dance* and the *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* to become one of country music's leading figures during the 1940s. After a series of records for ARC in the mid-thirties, he signed with Decca in 1941, producing such hits as "Old Shep," "Smoke on the Water," and "Hang Your Head in Shame."

In April 1946, Foley left Chicago to host the Prince Albert Tobacco portion of *The Grand Ole Opry*, fed to NBC radio affiliates across the country. For his back-up band, he recruited Nashville's top musicians, including Zeke Turner on guitar, Jerry Byrd on steel, Tommy Jackson on fiddle and Louis Innis on bass.

Meanwhile, a frustrated Eva Foley was eager to resume her own career. Besides witnessing her husband's career trajectory, her older sister Lucille emerged as Jenny Lou Carson, one of country music's top song writers. Adopting the stage name Judy Martin, Eva began her solo career as a 'cowgirl' vocalist in the Patsy Montana mold.

"Our Christmas Waltz" was written by Steve Nelson and his brother Ed G. Nelson, Jr., the sons of a veteran songwriter. Steve Nelson co-wrote the seasonal favorites "Frosty the Snowman" and "Peter Cottontail" with Jack Rollins and "Settin' the Woods on Fire" with his father.

"Our Christmas Waltz" is one of the few records that the Foleys made together. Even at that, it's primarily a Red Foley showcase with Eva limited to harmonizing on the closing verse. Although she was clearly talented, Decca did not seem interested in building her career. Depressed and growing paranoid, she took her own life in 1951.

20.

**Eddie Cletro**  
**with The Frontiersmen**  
**Give Me An**  
**Old Fashioned Christmas**

(Carl M. Lertzman)

recorded Fall 1955; Eddie Dean's studio,  
Hollywood, California  
with Edward O. 'Eddie' Cletro: vocal/guitar;  
unidentified: lead guitar; Hal Southern:  
guitar/backing vocal; Wayne West: bass/  
backing vocal; Enright A. 'Highpockets'  
Busse: accordion/backing vocal  
**Sage & Sand 214**

© 1955

During an era when county music was dominated by raw honky-tonk and rockabilly, Eddie Cletro (1918-2012) reflected the soothing western balladry that dominated late-forties country music.

Born Eddie O'Clethero in Trenton, New Jersey, Cletro's family moved to Los

Angeles during the early 1920s. Learning ukulele then guitar, Cletro was inspired by Cyprian 'Ezra' Paulette, the smooth-voiced leader of KMPC's The Beverly Hill Billies. Initially forming a band in the Hill Billies mode, he eventually began playing with more lucrative society orchestras. Never abandoning his love for western music, Cletro regularly appeared on Stuart Hamblen's *Lucky Stars* show on KFVB. In 1946 Spade Cooley hired him for one of the three bands he kept in rotation through southern California.

From 1952 to 1957 Cletro led the Round-Up Boys, the house band on KTLA's *Western Varieties*, hosted by Doye O'Dell. In fall 1955 he recorded "Give Me an Old-Fashioned Christmas" for Woodie Otto Fleener's Sage & Sand label. The song was penned by Carl Lertzman, who later became Cletro's manager. The accompanying musicians were the Frontiersmen, a seasoned western trio that Fleener often used for sessions.



**Eddie Cletro with daughter Diane**

With *Western Varieties* off the air and demand for western ensembles drying up, Cletro took a day job with an advertising specialties firm. He remained active as a

guitarist, spending evenings backing two strolling violinists at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. After his retirement, Cletro continued to sing informally until his death in 2012.

21.

**Bill Haley**

**I Don't Want To Be Alone  
This Christmas**

(Menaker-D'Onofrio-Russell)

recorded October 1951, Chester,  
Pennsylvania

with Bill Haley and the Saddlemen: Bill  
Haley: vocal/rhythm guitar; Danny  
Cedrone: lead guitar; Billy Williamson: steel  
guitar; Marshall Lytle: double bass; Johnny

Grande: piano

**Holiday 111**

© 1951



“I Don't Want to Be Alone This Christmas” was the flip side of “A Year Ago This Christmas.” The songs were coupled on Holiday 111, a record so rare that some collectors doubted if it was ever released.

These were not Haley's only Christmas sides. When United Artists signed him to its country roster in 1968, Haley recorded new versions of “Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree” and “Jingle Bell Rock.” Neither track would surface until 1994, when they



filled out a Rockstar CD anthology devoted to the Jodimars, and were included on the Bear Family boxset “The Warner Bros Years And More.”

22.

**Faron Young**

**I'm Gonna Tell Santa Claus  
On You**

(Thelma Blackmon)

recorded September 18, 1953 (Session # 3133) Castle Studio at the Tulane Hotel, Nashville, Tennessee;

Producer: Ken Nelson

with Faron Young: vocal; prob. Chester B. ‘Chet’ Atkins or Thomas Grady Martin: electric guitar; prob. Loren Otis ‘Jack’

Shook: guitar; prob. Bob Foster: steel guitar; Floyd T. ‘Lightnin’ Chance: bass; prob. Thomas Lee ‘Tommy’ Jackson, Jr:

fiddle

master 11787-3

**F 2629**

© 1953



Despite its country chart successes with Tex Ritter, Wesley Tuttle, Merle Travis, Hank Thompson and Tennessee Ernie Ford, the Hollywood-based Capitol Records needed a solid honky-tonk singer from the

southeast. In 1949 the label even sponsored talent shows along the East Coast to flush out undiscovered talent. When Capitol executives signed Cincinnati-based singer Jimmie Skinner, they soon discovered the inadequacies of the label's distribution system. Skinner's earlier Radio Artist releases reached backwaters communities that were inaccessible to Capitol.

And then came Faron Young from Shreveport, Louisiana. As gregarious as he was talented, Young (1932-1996) originally aspired to sing popular hits; he cited Nat 'King' Cole as an early influence. After his high school football coach introduced him to Hank Williams' M-G-M records, Young went to see the lanky Alabamian perform on *The Louisiana Hayride*. As he watched Williams take nine encores on "Lovesick Blues," Young immediately knew where his future lay.

Webb Pierce, also a *Louisiana Hayride* cast member, helped mentor Young, bringing him to the *Hayride*, placing him on a KWKH disc jockey job, and brokering a recording deal with the Philadelphia-

based Gotham label. Listening to KWKH while driving to Dallas, Capitol Records executive Ken Nelson heard Young's Gotham release. Determined to find the singer, he immediately headed towards Shreveport.

After signing with Capitol, Young moved to Nashville in August 1952, landing an early morning 'wake-up' show over WSM. That October he recorded his breakout single, "Goin' Steady," an upbeat tune in the Hank Williams mold. As it climbed to No. 2 on *Billboard's* country chart, the 20-year-old singer was drafted into the U.S. Army. Initially stunned by the news, Young was assigned to the Special Services and was allowed to continue his career. As 'PFC Faron Young,' he became a valuable recruiting spokesman for the army.

Young was still serving his hitch when he recorded "I'm Gonna Tell Santa Claus on You." Composer Thelma Blackmon (1919-1998) was an Oklahoma singer-songwriter who had a brief recording career on M-G-M Records in 1956-57.



23.

## The Ridge Riders

### Santa Claus' Boogie Song

(Jimmy Forrest-Oscar Washington)

recorded 1954, St. Louis, Mo.

Other details unknown

master M-100

**Range 1-001**

© 1954



In 1951 United Records scored a chart-topping rhythm and blues hit with “Night Train,” an twelve-bar blues instrumental written and recorded by tenor sax player Jimmy Forrest. Eager to claim a bigger slice of the publishing royalties, label owner Lewis P. Simpkins asked St. Louis schoolteacher Oscar D. Washington to write lyrics to Forrest’s melody. Even though these lyrics would seldom be sung, future composer credits would be shared and royalties distributed between all three men.

With his share of the “Night Train” income, Washington launched Ballad Records in mid-1953. His first release featured The Swans, a local doo-wop group. Despite its poor technical quality, the record sold well in African-American neighborhoods in St. Louis and nearby Illinois towns. (Another Ballad release by Joe Alexander and His Cubans featured an unknown Chuck Berry on guitar.)

Washington wrote “Santa Claus Boogie” for the Swans, releasing it on Ballad 1007, most likely in 1954. Looking to promote

the song in the country market, Washington created the Range label and recruited the Ridge Riders for a cover version. Little is known about this western-styled band, which had a regular slot over KWK in St. Louis since the late '30s. For the flip side, the Ridge Riders accompanied Ron ‘Uncle Buck’ Lipe, a disc jockey on KSGM in St. Genevieve, Missouri, on “My Hands Are Tied,” another Washington original. Years later Lipe recorded a now-coveted rockabilly single, “Mr. Ducktail,” for Ron-Mar Records.

24.

**Ernest Tubb**

## **Lonely Christmas Eve**

(Buddy Thornton)

recorded October 29, 1954 (10:30-13:30) Bradley Studio, Hillsboro Road, Nashville, Tennessee; Producer: Paul Cohen with Ernest Tubb: vocal; William L. ‘Billy’ Byrd: electric lead guitar; unknown: rhythm guitar; Dickie Harris: steel guitar; Jack Drake: bass; Farris Coursey: drums; Owen Bradley: piano  
master NA 3390/86 988

**De 29350**

© 1954



“Lonely Christmas Eve” was written by Milton ‘Billy’ Thornton (1918-2001). Little is known about this singer-songwriter from Abilene, Texas. He coupled the song with another Christmas original, “Ole Santa Is Coming to Town,” and distributed it via a custom pressing by 4-Star Records. Tubb likely received a copy from Thornton or from 4-Star owner Bill McCall, who controlled publishing on both titles.

25.

**George Jones**

### **Lonely Christmas Call**

(George Jones-Georgie Riddle)

recorded September 13, 1962, Columbia  
Recording Studio, 804 16th Avenue South,  
Nashville, Tennessee;  
Producer: Pappy Daily  
with George Jones: vocal;  
other details unknown  
master 4146

**UA 530**

© 1962

Recorded with a full-blown Nashville treatment, “Lonely Christmas Call” was George Jones’s first Christmas release in five years. *Billboard* praised the single, calling it a “touching weeper” with a “solid performance and strong material.”

Jones's current hit, "A Girl I Used to Know," still ranked high in the country charts when United Artists rush-released this holiday single in November 1962. As a result, the record came and went without a ripple.



Considering how prolific Jones was in the studio, it's surprising that he never recorded a Christmas album. He attempted one for Epic in 1974, but abandoned the project after completing four tracks.



26.

**Red Foley**  
**Here Comes**  
**Santa Claus**

(Gene Autry-Oakley Haldeman)

recorded August 23, 1949; Castle  
Studio at the Tulane Hotel, 206  
8th Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee;

Producer: Paul Cohen

with Red Foley: vocal/contractor:

Thomas Grady Martin: guitar;

Loren Otis 'Jack' Shook: guitar;

Billy Robinson: steel guitar; Ernest

F. 'Ernie' Newton: bass; Farris

Coursey: drums; William Owen

Bradley: piano

master NA 2010/75 193

**De 46185**

© 1949

“Here Comes Santa Claus” was already a two-year-old Christmas staple when Red Foley quickly covered it for the flip side of “Our Christmas Waltz.” Gene Autry may have had the original hit, but over time Foley’s Nashville recording aged far more gracefully.

27.

**Sonny James**  
**I Forgot To Remember  
Santa Claus**

(John Skye-Sonny James)

recorded July 26, 1954 (Session: #3486)

Jim Beck Studio,

1914 Forest Avenue, Dallas, Texas;

Producer: Ken Nelson

with Sonny James: vocal/guitar; Neal Jones:

rhythm guitar; Harland Powell: steel guitar;

Grundy 'Slim' Harbert: bass;

Eugene 'Buddy' Brady: fiddle; poss.

William 'Bill' Simmons: piano

master 12878

**F 2968**

© 1954



The flip side of “Christmas in My Hometown,” “I Forgot to Remember Santa Claus” was also written by Sonny James and John Polanski. While James gave the song a lively reading, it lacked the

memorable, readily identifiable melody needed for a Christmas classic. When reviewing possible candidates for his 1966 Christmas album, James intentionally forgot to remember “I Forgot to Remember Santa Claus.”

28.

**Faron Young**  
**You're The Angel On My  
Christmas Tree**

(Bud Ballard-Faron Young)

recorded September 18, 1953 (Session #  
3133) Castle Studio at the Tulane Hotel,  
Nashville, Tennessee;  
Producer: Ken Nelson  
with Faron Young: vocal;  
prob. Chester B. 'Chet' Atkins or Thomas  
Grady Martin: electric guitar; prob. Loren Otis  
'Jack' Shook: guitar; prob. Bob Foster: steel  
guitar; Floyd T. 'Lightnin' Chance: bass; prob.  
Thomas Lee 'Tommy' Jackson, Jr: fiddle  
master 11786

**F 2629**

© 1953



“You’re the Angel on My Christmas Tree” was released on the back of “I’m Gonna Tell Santa Claus on You.” In a 1953 *Billboard* survey, Faron Young listed it as his own favorite song, although this may have been a promotional gambit.

The song’s copyright entry identifies co-writer “Bud Ballard” as a pseudonym. That name also appears as a correspondent for *Pickin’ and Singin’ News*, published by *The Grand Ole Opry*’s long-time emcee George D. Hay. It’s quite possible that Young’s anonymous co-writer is actually WSM’s ‘Solemn Old Judge.’



29.

**Tennessee Ernie Ford**  
**A Rootin' Tootin' Santa Claus**

(Oakley Haldeman-Peter Tinturin)

recorded April 5, 1951

(Session: 2123: 21:10-00:10)

Capitol Studio, 5515 Melrose Ave.

Hollywood, California

with Tennessee Ernie Ford: vocal; Ivy J. 'Jimmy' Bryant: guitar; Edward M. 'Eddie' Kirk: guitar; Wesley Webb 'Speedy' West: steel guitar; Clifford G. 'Cliffie Stone' Snyder: bass/leader; Milton Curtis 'Muddy' Berry: drums; Harold Glenn Hensley: fiddle; William Edward 'Billy' Liebert: piano  
master 7403-11

**F 1830**

© 1951



Appearing on flip side of “Christmas Dinner,” “A Rootin’ Tootin’ Santa Claus” reflects the tight, lively arrangements that made Tennessee Ernie Ford’s early Capitol sides so appealing. Ford’s singles usually entered *Billboard*’s Top Ten country chart, but this catchy record failed to make a dent. Even more surprisingly, it was released during a fifteen-month dry spell when none of Ford’s releases clicked with disc jockeys, juke box suppliers or record buyers.

Composer Oakley Haldeman previously struck Christmas gold with his 1947 “Here Comes Santa Claus.” His collaborator Peter Tinturin was a classically trained Russian émigré who began his lengthy Hollywood career writing songs for ‘B’-westerns.

Despite its obscurity, Ford’s rootin’ tootin’ record unexpectedly appeared on the soundtrack of Paul Feig’s 2006 Christmas comedy *Unaccompanied Minors*.

30.

**Sandy Center**

## **Come On Baby, It’s Christmas**

(Imogene Center)

recorded 1956; Ruby Studio,  
1285 Parkamo Ave., Hamilton, Ohio.

Producer: Larry Short  
with Imogene ‘Sandy’ Center: vocal; and  
The Rainbow Rhythmaires: prob. Bert  
Jones or Clyde Marcum: electric guitar;  
poss. David Roark: rhythm guitar; poss.

Wendy Hargraves: steel guitar;  
prob. George Baker: fiddle;  
prob. Tommy Short: bass  
master GO8W-0110

**Ruby 260**

© 1956



Highly prized among country and rockabilly collectors, “Come On Baby, It’s Christmas” appeared on Larry Short’s Ruby label in 1956. Little is known about Sandy Center, who only made this one record backed by the Ruby house band, the Rainbow Rhythmaires.

**Dave Samuelson**

Camden, Indiana

June 2017