LIFE

Spice up Thanksgiving with these playlist recs



The cover art for the song "American Pie" is shown. This song was released originally in 1971.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @AMERICANSONGWRITER VIA INSTAGRAM



The cover art for Big Thief's song "Certainty" is shown. The track was released on the band's 2022 album, "Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You."

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With Thanksgiving coming up, it's time to start assembling a playlist for whatever gathering you might have with family or friends. But what actually constitutes a song as "Thanksgiving music" at all? Well, I'm still wondering too. While Christmas, Halloween and even Valentine's Day have clear cultural or thematic ties in music, Thanksgiving feels more nebulous.

But everyone deserves to have a set of songs playing while reconnecting with family, or while cooking Thanksgiving dinner with your best friends. Since there's not a ton of specific Thanksgiving music out there, here's a collection of autumnal songs that carry the theme of home and gratitude for others.

"American Pie" — Don McLean

There's something about McLean's American classic that has always screamed family gathering to me. The sprawling history that unfolds in each verse feels like it's being witnessed by a collective community bearing the entire burden, not just one person. The chorus makes for a carefree group singalong in the face of mortality. Something about it all conveys Thanksgiving to me, but maybe that's the pie doing some heavy lifting.

"Certainty" — Big Thief

This tender cut from Big Thief's 2022 album, "Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You," has a fresh, rugged road trip feel. Frontwoman Adrianne Lenker sings about scene after scene of traveling around with a loved one, letting this connection justify covering any distance. While the connection feels romantic, you can see appreciation and sings of any kind of love in the lines "My certainty is wild, weaving / For you, I am a child, believing," where Lenker's perspective is warped by time itself.

"In My Life" — The Beatles

"In My Life" stands as one of John Lennon's crowning love songs with The Beatles. And who could be surprised? The soft folk rock is of the upmost relaxation, and the lyrics complement it pleasantly. But perhaps the most "Thanksgiving-y" part of the song comes before the explicit romantic connection, when Lennon sings about place more generally. He reflects on where's lived and been, and how of everyone he's met, "Some are dead and some are living / In my life, I've loved them all." Now that's the lyricism of someone truly thankful for what they have.

"Crow Song" — Haley Heynderickx & Max García Conover

Whenever Haley Heynderickx and Max García Conover come together, you can be guaranteed that their music will be delightfully connected to nature and place. "Crow Song" finds the pair singing together of expansive wildlife scenery, with the flora and fauna of this outdoor place colliding in harmony. But woven between this imagery are mini narratives of people, told with precision and care. They're all remembered quite fondly, and the repeated refrain of "I'll be home wherever I go / I'll be home where I go someday" is a fitting mantra to take on for this holiday.

"Homeward Bound" — Simon & Garfunkel

Another pair that evokes appreciation in nearly every song is Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. On "Homeward Bound," a speaker stuck in a train station and in a constant state of travel longs to return home to a loved one. For that reason, it's the perfect pre-Thanksgiving song: something to put on as you're driving to your final destination. The warmth when their voices harmonize in the chorus to sing: "I wish I was / Homeward bound" is worth marveling at.

"Impressions of Susan" — John Fahey

While there's plenty of gathering during Thanksgiving that could benefit from music in the background, Thanksgiving dinner itself might be infringed upon with these lyrical tracks. For that reason, John Fahey's "Impressions of Susan" might be a worthy companion to the meal with its instrumental form. Fahey's acoustic guitar style, which draws from folk, classical and Indian influences, among others, moves with a sense of autumnal wonder on this composition. While it may not embody the holiday directly, its lighthearted tone manages to match it perfectly.

FIVE CHRISTMAS MOVIES TO WATCH TO LEVEL UP YOUR HOLIDAY SPIRIT



Hermey the elf and Rudolph are shown in a still from "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." The stop-motion television special debuted in 1964.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PICRYL

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If you're anything like me, the thought of Christmas already crept into my mind before you went to a Halloween party. Making aesthetic Pinterest boards, listening to cheery music and creating Christmas collages to set as my background always helps me set the vibe. Plus, making those little Christmas Pillsbury cookies?! 10/10.

I love this time of year because it gives me that perfect burst of joy I need during the cold winter days dealing with seasonal depression. The sky getting dark at 4 p.m. throws me off real bad. So, here are five movies you need to watch going into the holiday season to tap into your childhood wonder.

First of all, if you want to laugh, you need to check out "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." This 1989 film has some of the funniest and most ridiculous scenes I've seen in a movie, aside from perhaps "21 Jump Street," which is not a Christmas movie, but I recommend it, nonetheless.

"National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" is a comedy that centers around the Griswold family. Clark Griswold, the father, finds that making his family Christmas perfect may be a bit harder than expected as he endured a rough and relentless 97-minute-long series of unfortunate events that rival those in "Home Alone!" This film features an unforgettable sledding incident, abnormally large Christmas tree and chaotic, (mostly) family friendly fun!

My personal favorite Christmas movie is "Elf." Will Ferrell puts on a hilarious performance as Buddy the Elf, who crawled into Santa's sleigh as a baby and has grown up believing he is an elf. When Buddy realizes that his real father is out there in the big city of New York, he sets out on a mission determined to find and reconnect with his dad. Unfortunately, there's one problem... his father is on the naughty list! This heartfelt film fills me with the spirit of Christmas and childhood joy unlike any other movie. It is perfect to watch with the family, and the one-liners in the movie truly deliver.

If you want to watch another sweet, nostalgic film, "Rudolph" is a perfect option. The story of Rudolph is pretty well known, but I had to put it on this list. I'm sure you're familiar with his classic song, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Something about Rudolph always cheers me up. The themes of inclusion and the appreciation of diversity are so strong, and each character shows so much growth, even the abominable snowman. If you want to watch something with meaningful reminders to appreciate yourself and others completely, this is the go-to for you.

It wouldn't be Christmas if I didn't watch "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." I really enjoy both the 1966 and 2000 versions. If you want to feel the old timey vibes of the 60s as you watch, I highly recommend the original. If you want something funnier and more upbeat, I'd check out the 2000's version. "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" also contains meaningful lessons about the value of giving back, and the character growth and spirit are possible to find. If you need a pick me up, this is the one.

Lastly, another one of my favorite movies is "Frosty the Snowman." Although it does make me cry, since I am a bit of a softy, it is a very heartfelt and moving film. The bond between the main little girl, Karen, and Frosty is absolutely adorable to watch progress. As they make the trip to the North Pole, they must outrun Professor Hinkle, whose magic hat awakens Frosty. Another family friendly film, Frosty the Snowman reminds you that no matter how intense the heat gets, there's always a way to find yourself again. You'll have to watch to find out what I mean!

While these five films are mainstream, it's easy to forget to watch a festive movie with the business of the holiday season. So, light a candle, lean back and reconnect with your inner child this year.