

## The Ultimate Stand-off: *Real vs. Fake Trees*

BY MACKENZIE KNORR

**A**FTER THANKSGIVING, holiday decorations pop up seemingly overnight. Lights are strung, wreaths are hung, and Frosties are placed outside. For many, the weekend after Thanksgiving includes setting up a Christmas tree. Arguably the most important Holiday decoration, the Christmas tree debate begins; Which is better, a real or fake tree? Decide what works best for you after weighing the pro's and con's of each choice.

### Real Tree Pros:

- Real trees offer a classic Christmas feel, as well as an authentic pine scent.
- Real trees give the experience of picking out a tree. Family traditions are carried out when going to a tree farm, picking a tree, cutting it down, and bringing it home.
- There is a variety of types of trees so everyone is sure to find one they like. Pine, fir, and spruce are just a few of the tree options. The needles vary in size, length, color, and feel.
- Since the options for a Christmas tree are vast, the experience and look can be different each year! This can lead to the perfect compromise for some families, where opinions on the best type of tree are diverse.
- They're better for the environment than fake trees. Real Christmas trees can be recycled or composted after the holiday season.

### Real Tree Cons:

- They're messy! Pine needles will naturally shed from the tree which means a lot of cleaning up after your au natural tree.
- The needles from the trees can be harmful to pets when ingested.
- Real trees tend to be more expensive depending on your location and the type of tree you're looking for.
- Much like fresh-cut flowers, real trees need a lot of water to stay perky. This can be difficult to remember in the craziness of the holiday season.

### Fake Tree Pros:

- They're reusable! Many people purchase an artificial tree and reuse the same one year after year.
- Fake trees are pet friendly. No harmful pine needles for your furry friends to ingest.
- They're a great choice for people with allergies to pine needles.
- Artificial trees are compact and easily storable after disassembly.
- There are various styles of fake trees offered in stores, including trees with an airbrush of fake snow, trees with lights already installed, and many other shapes, sizes, and colors.

### Fake Tree Cons:

- Artificial trees hurt small, family owned tree farm businesses.
- Artificial trees can harm the environment, due to the amount of energy needed to produce and transport the trees as well as the material the trees are made of. Research also shows that most fake trees have trace amounts of lead.
- There is a danger factor when using a fake tree since they are extremely flammable.
- What happens when you don't want your fake tree anymore? The only environmentally friendly way to dispose of a fake tree is reusing it somehow, by giving it away to a friend or charity. If your fake tree is broken, or disposed of unethically, it will just lead to more garbage in landfills.

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## The Best Christmas Music

BY MARA GRAU

**E**very year it seems like Christmas music starts being played earlier and earlier, which is something that really bothers me. I am one of those people who believes that it is only acceptable to play Christmas music after Thanksgiving is over, and even then, I am just not a big fan of it. Don't get me wrong, I can appreciate the songs and the holiday spirit they bring with them, but I can only listen to so many songs about snow and Santa before I go crazy.

For me, there is one exception, one type of Christmas music that is so good I wouldn't mind listening to it all year round. I am talking about the Christmas music from Trans-Siberian Orchestra (TSO). Even if you've never heard their name, you've heard their music. TSO, formed in 1996, is the brainchild of the late Paul O'Neill. Over the past twenty-two years, they have put out four Christmas albums with both original songs and reimagined classics.

One of their best songs and arguably their most popular is "*Christmas Eve/Sarajevo 12/24*" from their first album, *Christmas Eve and Other Stories*. This instrumental track is a hard-hitting mashup of "*God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*" and "*Carol of the Bells*". By themselves, both of these songs are terrific music staples for the holiday season, but together as one song they instantly get anyone pumped up for Christmas. Another popular song from TSO's debut Christmas album is "*A Mad Russian's Christmas*" which features rock versions of various music from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, including "*Russian Dance (Trepak)*" and "*Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*". Listening to this song will instantly motivate you to get up and decorate for Christmas or bake cookies; it simply embodies the spirit of Christmas time.

By now you can probably tell that slower Christmas music is not something that I like, but if you do, TSO has plenty of unique holiday music for you as well. Another one of their most popular songs is called "*Christmas Canon*," it is Christmas themed lyrics set to Pachelbel's "*Canon in D Major*" sung by a children's choir. This song is incredibly beautiful, heartwarming, and worth listening to. Some of their other more relaxed holiday songs include "*The Wisdom of Snow*" and "*The Silent Nutcracker*."

Some of Trans-Siberian Orchestra's Christmas albums are driven by stories supported by narrations and inspirational lyrics. Each of their albums has a mix of typical songs with verses and choruses (most of which are wholly original) and instrumental songs. TSO found a way to create unique and instantly loveable Christmas music for people with all kinds of musical tastes. So why listen to another cover of "*Silent Night*" or "*It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas*" when you can listen to Christmas songs that aren't overdone and played to death? †

Photography provided by Mara Grau

Below is a photo from the live show Trans-Siberian Orchestra live at the Xcel Energy Center

