

## AMERICAN OPINION

# The power of holiday tunes is a positive

It's easy to take Christmas music for granted. Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You" can be a polarizing force during the holidays, splitting friend groups and family members along a jingling divide. From around Thanksgiving on, radios, grocery stores, department stores and many public spaces have Christmas or holiday music piped in, an onslaught of familiar tunes that evoke nostalgia or irritation.

But it doesn't have to be so. The holidays are a time for togetherness, peace and tidings of joy. This well complements music's ability to bring people closer together in a shared experience, a fact felt best at live concerts and shows.

Pittsburgh is renowned for its wealth of cultural treasures and musical institutions, from the symphony to the opera to smaller companies like the Mendelssohn Choir and Resonance Works. Many are offering holiday-themed programming — what better time for those who are able to come together in fellowship of music?

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra of course has its Highmark Holiday Pops tradition, complete with a visit from Santa Claus the coming weekends. The Mendelssohn Choir is exploring a variety of seasonal programming, while Resonance Works is tapping into a more European Christmas tradition with the opera "Hansel and Gretel." Duquesne University is hosting a Christmas sing-along. And much more.

It's easy to adopt the Grinch's attitude in the face of such opportunities due to this music's ubiquity, but there's a key difference in passively letting the familiar tunes wash over you and actively listening to these melodic treasures.

For many if not most, this music is evocative of a more innocent time in their lives, a chance to relive the wonder and excitement of the holidays.

Pittsburgh is blessed with a wealth of such opportunities for families to come together to appreciate a vanishing musical moment. Those looking to start a new tradition or to simply take some time away from the hustle and bustle of the season would do well to remember the simple joy of attending such performances.

This American Opinion editorial is the opinion of the editorial board of Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.



Michael Becker / Apple / TNS  
Mariah Carey's holiday special, "Mariah's Christmas: The Magic Continues," is streaming on Apple TV+.

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# America needs a campaign to beat its gun addiction

By Dan Rodricks  
The Baltimore Sun (TNS)

**Baltimore**  
What kind of man — or teenage boy, for all we know — kills a young father in front of his children? Is that some sadistic idea that came from a video game, or did the shooter think of that on his own?

I need to go over this to make sure I've not become numb to the incessant news of violence in Baltimore, as the seventh straight year of 300-plus homicides comes to a close.

According to police, some hooded and masked thug walked up to 34-year-old Jake Rogers Thursday morning and shot him while Rogers was helping his three children into a minivan in front of his house in the Waltherson neighborhood. A neighbor heard gunshots and children screaming.

Imagine the effect this will have on those kids — seeing their father shot, then falling dead on the front lawn.

Guns are everywhere — in the hands of the angry and the violent, the stupid and the cruel, the mentally ill and the suicidal. Guns are in the hands of calculating killers and impulsive idiots.

I keep thinking of those three children.

On Saturday, two other children were traumatized. Their father shot his former girlfriend inside a house in South Baltimore, then drove his BMW, with the children in the back seat, to Columbia to shoot his ex-wife. The father made an appearance on Facebook between killings. He ended the horror by shooting himself. Fortunately, he did not shoot the children, but he undoubtedly harmed them.

Guns make settling scores easy for cowards: Just point and squeeze, and all your antagonisms go away. Turn it on yourself and your misery ends. But suicide causes far more pain than it relieves.

Think of those children in the back seat.

Then, on Monday, Baltimore County police told us about a murder-suicide in Timonium, another husband-wife horror. Police believe the husband went into the master bedroom where his wife was sleeping with one of their three children. He shot the wife, then told the child to leave the room. Moments later, the children in the house heard a second gunshot.

Think of those kids.

And it's not just here. It's everywhere. Homicides by gun are spiking across the country, in small cities and large cities and in suburban communities, and for every killing there are multiple victims of trauma, including children.

People worry these days that the nation will collapse in civil war, but in terms of gunfire and death, we're already well into one. Americans have been killing each other at an alarming rate for decades. The whole country has been traumatized by now. Not all of us, of course, and not directly. But even indirectly, there's a psychological cost. Just thinking about a fellow Baltimorean being shot while helping his children into a minivan creates a palatable level of trauma. Living in a country where

mass shootings are commonplace, where the news of shootings is constant — that's a subliminal trauma no one has measured yet.

You can try to block it out, but it's hard to escape the fact that there's so much killing around us. Violence is atmospheric in the United States.

People — those who actually acknowledge this reality — immediately fall into questions of law and policy and the who's-to-blame for school shootings and domestic killings. But the problem is much bigger than the usual suggested remedies.

The country certainly needs changes in laws that might reduce the easy access to guns and even the number of guns.

But what America needs is a transformational awakening in the spiritual realm — facing the awful reality that there's too much needless death from guns and resolving as a moral imperative to do something about it.

I know: If that didn't happen after the deaths of first graders at Sandy Hook, when will it ever come? And from where?

That question goes right to the heart of this complex problem — the lack of moral leadership and unifying voices in a country that has splintered into factions. It seems hopeless.

But if we walk away, the killing will continue and get even worse. So, it needs to be said: The spiritual transformation begins when Americans break from our own history and vow to be nonviolent and turn away from guns even when surrounded by guns.

How does that happen?

Change of this scale in a country this large needs to be seeded with big money. In the name of national security — that is, making the nation safer — we take a few billion dollars from the defense budget, combined with billions more in philanthropy, for a long messaging campaign to get families to eliminate violence from their lives — in the movies they watch, in the video games they play, in how parents speak to each other and to their children.

If that sounds trite, just keep in mind: There is no anti-violence messaging to match and counter all the violent messaging that infests our culture. It would be like having a national anti-litter campaign again, a taxpayer-supported effort toward a better country.

We need therapy on-demand for the masses. We need to move more billions from national defense to recruit an army of social workers to counsel people at all levels of risk of harming or killing others. Maybe then more Americans would embrace peace and reject violence as an answer to their problems. Maybe then more Americans would melt their guns.

All in favor of a less violent country, please raise your hands.

# Seven senators who go back to the days of the Civil War

By Jamie Stiehm  
Creators Syndicate

**Washington**  
When I walk by John Calhoun in the Capitol, I stare at his severe portrait and I swear the ghost has fire burning in his eyes.

Make no mistake, Calhoun's spirit still roams the halls in several Republican senators. Starting with the Capitol riot and siege on Jan. 6, this truth became painfully clear.

Let me name seven names here. House Republicans are full of malice and mischief, but senators should not escape scrutiny while the House select committee investigates the Jan. 6 conspiracy.

Calhoun of South Carolina (of course) was the architect and instigator of the Civil War, though he never lived to see the day. On his deathbed in 1850, the pro-slavery zealot precisely predicted how it would come.

Calhoun would be downright delighted at our divided nation. What's the difference between an armed insurrection and a rebel army, after all? Each waged war on the state from within.

Today, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas wins first place for aggressive acts against the government, lately blocking some of President Joe Biden's ambassadorial nominees.

Worse, in the last act of the Jan. 6 tragedy, Cruz had the nerve to challenge the certification of Biden's victory in the dark morning hours. As if courting an audience of one: glowering loser Donald Trump.

Nobody likes Cruz, who represents the largest Confederate slave state. Calhoun was just like him: single-minded in opposition at every turn.

President Andrew Jackson made the best comment of his cruel life when he said his only regret was not hanging his vice president, Calhoun.

Arrogant freshman Sen. Josh Hawley, another Yalie, raised his fist to the gathering pro-Trump mob outside the Capitol. I walked past them, too, on the stately grounds and felt my bones chill.

Hawley was raised on Rush Limbaugh hate talk in their shared home state, Missouri, a slave state. Hawley's looks are clean-cut, but his heart is dark.

I might add, Rick Scott of Florida was a Southern Senate Republican who challenged the constitutional count and prolonged the agony of the worst day Americans witnessed in the Capitol.

I'm making a list of others, checking it twice.

Also among the truly awful Republican senators are: Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Rand Paul of Kentucky, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and John Barrasso of Wyoming.

Since his House days, Graham is totally unprincipled and recently, strikingly slavish toward Trump. Paul insulted Dr. Anthony Fauci at a COVID-19 committee hearing. Johnson is trying to undermine his own state election rules. Strident Barrasso cuts up Biden constantly, like the surgeon he is.

Yes, I'm giving Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky a pass. And anybody Trump hates as an old "crow" can't be all bad.

Calhoun declared any president opposed to slavery's expansion would see a civil war break out. That president was prairie newcomer Abraham Lincoln, elected a decade later. War was started by Calhoun's home state.

170 years after he lay dying, Calhoun's true political heir is a confederate named Trump.