

'Tis ALMOST The Season
by Joe Bunn for DJN

Well DJs, can you believe it? It's dangerously close to holiday time as this goes to press. Hopefully, you re-booked all of your corporate holiday parties that you did in 2015 and got tons more on top of that...as we all know Christmas gifts are expensive and you need money to buy them!

Before you get to those shows, let's go over a few things to make sure you are prepared. Whether you are a veteran at these or a rookie going into your first holiday season, we can all use a refresher sometimes.

As I like to do in most of my articles, let's break this down into sections, namely, the different parts of the event.

Cocktails. Typically, the host (company or individual) will have a cocktail hour just like most wedding receptions do. This allows folks time to get there, check their coat and mingle before dinner/dancing/program. During this time, I'll usually do a mix of standards from old school crooners like Sinatra and some of the newer guys like Buble, but also throw in some of my favorite singer-songwriters like Ray Lamontagne, Van Morrison and Jack Johnson. I don't use as many "love" type songs as I do for weddings obviously, especially if spouses weren't invited. Also, at holiday parties, it's great to throw in some Christmas songs, HOWEVER, and I can't stress this enough, you MUST ask your client if this is OK. You must be considerate of other people's religious beliefs before you start cranking out Christmas classics, especially those mentioning Jesus. That being said, there are two ways to still be politically correct AND get in some holiday tunes. First, you can play instrumentals. I have an awesome CD (yes, it was on CD at one time) from a guy named Warren Hill (think Kenny G but not as corny) that I play during holiday party cocktail hour. I don't play the whole thing, I sprinkle in a few of the best known ones from that album and you're still operating as "PC" because there are no words! The other thing you can do is really go through your holiday music playlist and create a sub playlist titled "PC Holiday Beats" or something like that. In other words, steer clear of the religious ones and stick with stuff like "Baby It's Cold Outside" (recorded by 100 people over the years, pick your favorite). Another great idea for the cocktail hour, especially if you're playing for a young or hipster type crowd is seek out Christmas remixes. Just type that into iTunes. There are tons of compilations. Take some time and listen, and you'll discover some amazing treats. What once used to be your least favorite holiday song ever can be amazing with the right producer and beat behind it.

Dinner. During dinner, stick to the same rules as above. If they want holiday music, ask first if it's going to be OK with all of the guests. You'd be surprised sometimes that the host hasn't even thought about this (especially if they are Christian). For my dinner music, I just do a little more "chill" version of what I do for cocktails. It's a lot of the same artists that I mentioned in the paragraph above, but just not as swingin'. The tempo is a little more relaxed, and the volume might just be a touch lower to allow people to talk across tables.

Program. Normally, at the end of dinner, instead of toasts and cake cutting like at a wedding, there is some sort of program. This is usually where the host or CEO would speak, welcome everyone, tell them what a great year they had (whether true or not) and then do some sort of giveaway. Most of the parties we do here have several gifts to give away, mostly just by doing a simple number drawing. Others get more elaborate and create game shows or other ways to win. For example, I think it's called "Bad Santa" or something like that where Suzy from accounting gets picked to come up and pick a wrapped prize from the table. She opens it and it's an iPad. Of course she wants to keep it, but the next person up can choose whether they want Suzy's iPad or something from the table...which could be better, or terrible. It's a fun game, but be sure when you are discussing the show with the client, if you are going to need to MC things like that.

Dancing. At the end of the day, dancing is dancing. You can ditch the holiday songs for this part of the night. My base starting playlist for corporate events is similar to my wedding one to be honest. But just like at a wedding, I use the time during cocktails and dinner to spy on my crowd. I try and get a sense of how old they are, are they single or married, are they drinking a lot. During dinner, I open up that base playlist which has a lot of your standard party rockers ranging from "RESPECT" by Aretha Franklin through current Top 40 stuff and then I start deleting or adding to it based on my "research" from earlier in the evening. You're definitely going to get requests, which I gladly take as long as they go with the songs that are working for me, and you're probably going to have to play several line dances (literally all of them if spouses aren't invited). Accept it. Embrace it! The bottom line is that you want to rock this party which is going to lead to a re-book next year and possibly several other events with the company throughout the coming year. Good luck and Happy Holidays DJ fam!!!