



I Fought Mariah Carey's 'Queen of Christmas' Trademark Because It Was My Duty to Save Christmas (Exclusive)

Elizabeth Chan explains the tireless devotion that has helped her to write 1,500 Christmas songs during the past 14 years, and why she went up against Mariah Carey to defend her Queen of Christmas title

Published

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Elizabeth Chan has written 1,500 Christmas songs during the past 14 years. Merry Bright Music

Every day is Christmas for Elizabeth Chan, a full-time holiday-themed songwriter who has penned 1,500 Christmas songs. So when she learned that Mariah Carey had attempted to trademark the title "Queen of Christmas," a move that would bar any other entertainer from using it going forward, she knew she had to take action. In 2021, Chan filed a legal motion to block Carey's efforts, and last year, she won the battle.

During the past 14 years, in which she's devoted every day to writing Christmas music, Chan has released 13 albums. Her latest is *Songs From Noelle*, which she co-wrote her daughter Noelle, who also sings on the record. She used "Queen of Christmas" as the title for her 2021 album, as well as its spoken-word title track. And while doing legal prep ahead of the release, her entertainment attorney flagged that Carey had filed the trademark application. But Chan wasn't just trying to score a victory for her own gain. She didn't want Carey's ownership to prevent other beloved holiday "queens" from using the name, including Brenda Lee and Darlene Love. Carey's trademark bid would've spanned beyond music, cornering the phrase for use on hundreds of products including perfume and nail polish, dog leashes, cake mixes, corkscrews, fruit juices, sunglasses and backpacks.

If Carey won, Chan and others who profit from the season would've been forced to remove mentions of "Queen of Christmas" from websites, social media pages,

promotional materials, merch and more. Chan might have even had to rename her 2021 album. Today, she's looking back one year after her win, and 14 years after committing to Christmas music full-time.



People call me the Queen of Christmas

People call me the Queen of Christmas, and I've put out 13 albums. I have two dozen songs on the radio right now, all over the world. It's just such an honor to just be able to do what you want to do as an artist and as a person and as a human and as a mom. I wouldn't want to be just remembered for one song alone, which is great, and something that I initially sought to achieve. But I realize now the bigger message is to encourage people who hear my music and hear my story that you should never let anything get in your way.

I was kind of given that title. I didn't give myself that title. I think after my third or fourth *Billboard* hit, and I've had 12 or 13 songs on the *Billboard* charts, just Christmas music, when I would walk into a radio station, people would introduce me, "There she is, the Queen of Christmas!" Because when you're the most prolific artist in a genre of music, whether it's jazz or country, you're the Queen of Soul or the Queen of Pop. Because I only did Christmas music, the industry started calling me the Queen of Christmas in emails and introductions. When I would walk into a room, it was just the most logical thing for them to exclaim. She only does Christmas music. It's just an honorific title that is really meaningful for me because there's not much recognition that I can achieve. I'm like Santa Claus, people only care about me during Christmas, and then once January rolls around, I'm just back writing Christmas music. I don't think I'll ever win a Grammy. I don't think I'll ever be able to get an American Music Award. These are not things that I

think I would qualify for, but to be recognized in this way is very meaningful. And I'm grateful. Anyone who works really hard just wants to be appreciated and recognized.

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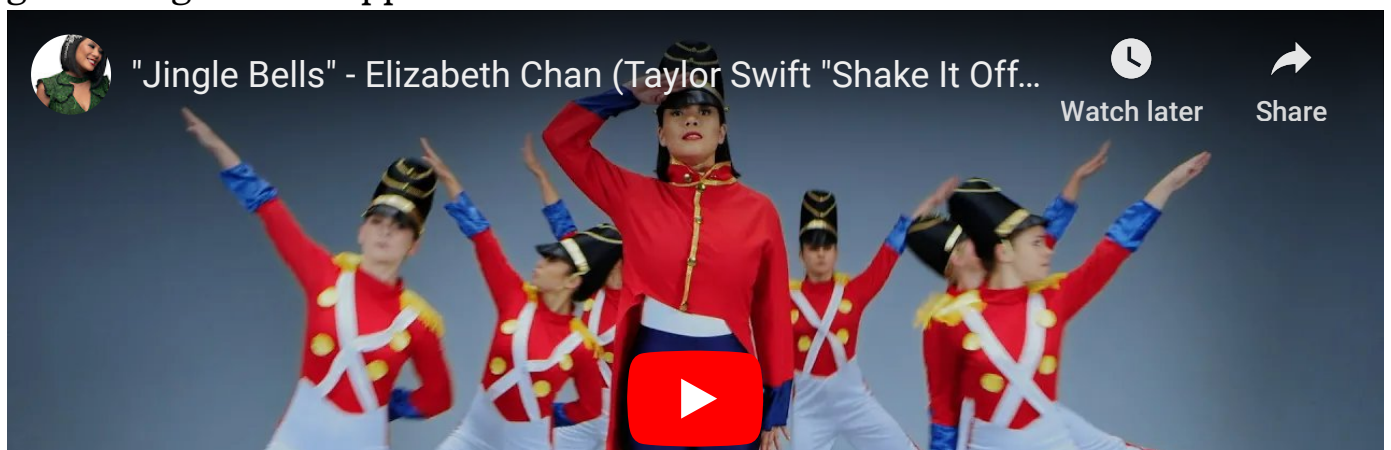
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I'm the only full-time Christmas composer, producer, songwriter and artist

It's something that I could have only pursued once I realized that life is what you make of it. And I don't think that all of us get to that point early enough in life. I got to a point where I had another career [as director of integrated marketing at *Self* magazine] and I was in my office thinking, is this it? Is this all I'm meant to be? And I just knew in my heart that it wasn't, so just as much as I was working for somebody else at a job toiling away hours and hours and weeks and years at a time, I kind of had this revelation where I knew that I had a dream and I actually focused on trying to achieve that dream for hours and days and weeks and months at a time and years at a time. I actually didn't know that it would be this many years if you asked me when I started. It's been 14 years. But I knew that if I actually put the effort into my own dreams as I did for global corporations, maybe great things could happen.





Crafting my own profession

I just went straight to Christmas once I quit my job. And it's funny because I was offered a publishing deal and they wouldn't let me just write all Christmas songs. They wanted me to write pop songs, but I knew that if people knew that I could write pop songs, I would never be able to work and refine the Christmas music that I wanted to. I mean, it would be no different than any other job that I would step into. So I knew that I had to craft my own profession. I had to figure out how to make Christmas music and make it work for me. And I knew that that was never going to be letting other people tell me how to do it because most people told me it couldn't be done. It was not a financial thing. And truth be told, the first maybe two years I was dead broke. The only compass I had, and the only compass I still have is when I wake up every morning and I say, do I still want to do this? I love that. Do I still want to write more music? Do I still want to achieve more Christmas songs? And the answer has always been "Yes."

I did not go into my career to go into litigation with a global pop star

There was one day where I was going to give it up because I was doing something that had nothing to do with my Christmas music, but had challenged me as a Christmas artist — and that was my litigation with Mariah Carey. And it was a very difficult, difficult time, and I did not go into my career to go into litigation with a global pop star. And that felt out of water for me, and it was very difficult. And I remember telling my husband I wanted to give up, and I was crying in my office, and I remembered finding my baptismal certificate in my office. I was looking through papers and files, and I found my baptismal certificate, and I had never noticed the date I was baptized before, but it turned out that I was baptized on Christmas Sunday, and I saw that as a sign to not give up. And throughout my career, I had always seen Christmas signs. I had always seen small things that would just continue to carry me through my journey.

If I have the great fortune to be remembered like a Nat King Cole, I want people to remember my legacy and my life as a reminder during the holiday season when we're all taking stock of the year behind us, and we're all looking into the new year that I'm proof that if you actually give a chance, great things can happen. I stand by that purpose and that purpose has fueled me for the last 14 years.

It was my duty to save Christmas

I am so grateful that I've been able to save Christmas for everyone so that you who's reading or anybody can decide who their queen of Christmas is. I think people don't understand that when you trademark something, it's like the Super Bowl. It's outrightly owned by the NFL, and what Mariah Carey wanted was to outrightly own the words Queen of Christmas and Princess of Christmas. So I just said, "Wait a second. You want to own it so that no one can be recognized? So that Brenda Lee can't be recognized? So that Darlene Love can't be recognized? So I can't be recognized? So Noelle can't be recognized when she's already been called the Princess of Christmas?" She's been growing up with me and my fans just endearingly called her that because I was called the Queen of Christmas. I just thought it was so insane, and the most insane part was that I was the only one to stand up and say, no, this isn't right. This idea of a Queen of Christmas came way before Mariah Carey, and it'll continue way after all of us. So I thought it was part of my duty to everyone at Christmas to save Christmas.



Writing Christmas music is a muscle

Seinfeld is part of my inspiration. He says that the way he sees writing jokes is a muscle. So he writes jokes every day. And for me, writing Christmas music is a muscle. So I'm constantly writing songs, writing lyrics, writing melodies every day. And it started, when I first quit my job, I said, "OK, I'm going to work for myself. And as my own boss, my expectation is to write one Christmas song every day." And so for the first two, three years, I had written maybe the first 500 songs. The thing that I do that I believe has worked very well is I'll put these songs away for a few years, and if I can remember them, the lyrics or the melody without much effort, then I know that those are great, catchy songs. And then I'll put them

on an album. So every song that I put on an album is carefully curated, and it's when I think that songs are ready, like a wine or a cheese, it's like there's a vintage to my songs that people don't realize because they're hearing them new. But for me, I'll know that I've let them kind of test the timelessness. Definitely the timelessness check.

I have a Christmas tree up in my studio all year round

I have a Christmas tree up in my studio, in my office, all year round. What helps me get into the Christmas spirit is actually not the sight — definitely the sounds, right? So I'm constantly playing, listening to Christmas music, writing Christmas music, writing Christmas poetry, but it's the smell. So I always have a pine-cone smell, a pine-tree smell of Christmas-tree scents. I use peppermint soaps. I love to wash my hands. It's the smell. It's actually the smell that brings my memories back.

Christmas is every day for me

Christmas is every day for me in the sense that I live and abide by the philosophies and the tenets that make Christmas special. I wonder why as a society, we only allow ourselves to celebrate our family and each other and togetherness for such a short part of the year. When people hear that I celebrate Christmas every day, it's not like I'm wearing an ugly Christmas sweater every day. That's not what it's about. It's about living with the spirit of the holiday season every day of my life so that I can write the music to share by the end of the year. But on Christmas Day, now that I have children, it's just such an honor to have Santa Claus and the presents. ... The minute that Christmas music starts is when Christmas begins. So we get very excited when we hear Christmas music playing, and we sing along with every song on the radio.



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