**Christmas Music**

**James R. Murray, created a lot of confusion when he first published his song “Away in a Manger.” For some unknown reason, he listed the tune in a children’s song book as “Luther’s Cradle Hymn,” further indicating that it had been “composed by Martin Luther for his children” and was “still sung by German mothers to their little ones.” Not surprisingly, this led a lot of people to believe that Martin Luther himself composed the song. But Luther had nothing to do with it. Murray adapted the lyrics from a poem he found in an 1885 Lutheran schoolbook. And despite Murray’s original subtitle, the song “Away in a Manger” is virtually unknown in Germany. *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**A New Jersey high school band was instructed not to play any instrumental versions of holiday songs whose lyrics – though not being – refer to God, Santa Claus, Christmas, or Hanukkah. “Rather than try to respond to all the various religions and try to balance them, it’s best to stay away from that and simply have a nonreligious tone,” said superintendent Peter Horoschak. The band will play only “Winter Wonderland,” “Frosty the Snowman,” and other generic holiday tunes. *(The Week magazine, December 10, 2004)***

**Billy sings: “Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel! Barney’s the king of Israel!” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

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**I heard the bells on Christmas Day. Their old familiar carols play. And wild and sweet the words repeat. Of peace on earth goodwill to men. *(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)***

**In Christmas 1980, because of an ACLU lawsuit over the nativity scene in front of the City and County Building, then-Mayor William H. McNichols asked carillonneur Robert Gift to not play religious tunes on the building bells. Gift’s 35-song repertoire was suddenly reduced to just a handful of eligible songs. And many of them would not work on the notes available. *(Rocky Mountain News)***

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**He came up to me at the end of a sermon and shook my hand, “I can understand ‘God bless me,’ but how can I ‘Bless God’?’ What does it mean when we sing, ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul?’” I said, “Do you have any children?” “Yes,” he replied, “I have a boy who is six and a girl who is five.” I asked, “At Christmas time do they ever give you a present?” “Sure,” he replied. “Where do they get the money,” I asked. “Well, I give it to them,” he chuckled. “That’s exactly it,” I said. “You pay for the Christmas presents your children give you. You’re so glad when they are talking about it with their mother. They are whispering secrets. They are excited that they are going to surprise daddy. Then on Christmas morning they come and say, “Daddy, here is a blessing for you.” It ultimately came from you, but it was a blessing because it came back with their love.” When we sing, “We bless Thee, O Lord,” we are praising Him with the blessings He puts in our lives. *(Donald Grey Barnhouse, in Illustration Digest)***

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**Drabble: “I can’t believe I missed the end of the game because I had to listen to carolers! Why would a bunch of kids insist on singing me the world’s longest song at a time like that?” Mr. Steinbauer: “Well done, children! Next week I’ll hire you to sing to my former auto mechanic!” Kids: “Thank you, Mr. Steinbauer!” *(Kevin Fagan, in Drabble comic strip)***

**Dolly is reading to her little brother: “Then the three wise men came to baby sit while Mary and Joseph went caroling.” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

**Many Christmas songs actually came from traditional dance tunes. Centuries ago, people began adding words to the music to tell a religious story. These songs became known as carols, from the word “carole,” a type of French dance. Today “carol” usually means any joyful song sung around the winter holidays. Carols often tell a story. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**Grandma: “So are you saying you don't care for my singing of Christmas carols?” Grandpa: “That's right!” Grandma: “Okay, fine, I'll stop singing if you'll agree to do all our Christmas preparations. That means writing the newsletter, wrapping the gifts, putting up the decorations.” Grandpa: “Deal! Where's the duct tape?” *(Brian Crane, in Pickles comic strip)***

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**The San Fernando Valley was in the midst of a blistering heat wave in July 1946 when Mel Torme stopped by to visit his musical collaborator, Robert Wells. Torme sat down at the piano and saw an open notebook, with some scrambled notes: “Chestnuts roasting ... Jack Frost nipping ... Yuletide carols ... Folks dressed up like Eskimos.” Wells explained that he was trying to cool off by thinking of wintry images. Torme decided that the random thoughts had the potential to be a hit song, and 40 minutes later, “The Christmas Song” (often called “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire”) was completed. *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Grandma: “I put jingle bell collars on Muffin and Roscoe for the holidays. Aren’t they adorable?” Woman: “Yes, they are.” Grandma: “And I think the ‘jingle-jingle’ helps them to feel a part of the festivities.” The cat then says to the dog: “I’ll chew off yours if you’ll chew off mine.” *(Brian Crane, in Pickles comic strip)***

**Labor unions in the Czech Republic demanded Monday that stores stop playing Christmas carols incessantly or pay compensation for causing emotional trauma to sales clerks. Some stores here play the same songs all day -- and play them loudly. Employees say shifts have become unbearable. Unions have written to major chains, and demanded that employees be compensated. They’ve received no response. *(Associated Press, as it appeared in Rocky Mountain News, December 23, 2003)***

**In Washington, D.C., a group of carolers, singing holiday songs in a neighborhood after hosting a dinner for the handicapped, were charged with disorderly conduct after homeowners complained the singing was a nuisance. *(Bill Flick, 1995)***

**Ma: “Pa, I don’t think the neighbors like the drum we got Johnny for Christmas.” “Why?” said Pa. Ma: “They gave him a knife and asked him if he what was in the drum.” *(Supervision)***

**With lyrics like “Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose,” it evokes the feeling of a cold December perfectly. Actually it was written during a summer heat wave in Los Angeles. According to one account: “Mel Torme and his lyricist wrote it in less than an hour, while consuming cold drinks at the piano and putting ice to their foreheads.” *(Uncle John’s Biggest Ever Bathroom Reader, p. 413)***

**The Christmas carol that begins, “God rest you merry gentleman” is usually mispunctuated and missung. The correct phrase is, “God rest you merry, gentlemen.” Though the carol was first written down in 1827, it is at least four hundred years older than that. And as used in the 15th century, “merry” meant “pleasantly,” which was how the singer hoped the gentleman rested. *(Jeff Rovin, in The Unbelievable Truth, p. 120)***

**The eight-day Jewish celebration of Hanukkah usually comes in December. During this time, people sing many traditional songs. Children sing the “Dreidel Song” about a dreidel, a special toy top with four sides. Another song both adults and children might sing is “Hanukkah. Oh Hanukkah.” It is more about the pleasure of gathering with family and friends during this holiday rather than about the religious services. Many modern composers have written Hanukkah music for children and young adults that connects the old traditions with modern experiences. One of the most well-known of the newer Hanukkah songs is “Light One Candle.” It was written by Peter Yarrow, and performed by his singing group, Peter, Paul & Mary. It sings about the long Jewish fight to create a better world. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**In 1840, Felix Mendelssohn was commissioned to write a suitable song for an upcoming celebration commemorating the invention of the printing press. The cantata he composed probably would’ve been long forgotten if it hadn’t been for an English musician named William H. Cummings. Cummings took the lyrics from a somber hymn written by John Wesley in 1739 called “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and set them to Mendelssohn’s melody. *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Do you know that many of the holiday songs you sing today were actually written many years ago? Some holiday music has been sung for years in religious services such as Hanukkah and Christmas. Hundreds of years ago, traveling musicians passed on holiday music from village to village. Other holiday songs, written in modern times, have become hits through movies, radio and TV. Many people love music from the winter holidays because it brings up memories of special times with families or friends. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**James Pierpont, the uncle of financier J. P. Morgan, was an aspiring songwriter. In 1857, he published a song celebrating the winter sport of sleigh racing. The tune, entitled “The One Horse Open Sleigh,” was first performed at his church’s Thanksgiving service that year. It was so well received that he played it again a month later at the Christmas service. Two years later, his song was so popular that he re-published it under the name by which it is still known today: “Jingle Bells.” *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Kwanzaa is an African-American celebration that honors the family. It takes place from December 26 through January 1. It was started in 1966 in the United States. Although many composers have written music especially for Kwanzaa, people celebrate with a variety of family music with African roots. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**There was a time, up until about 800 years ago, when people did not sing many religious songs. Most Christian music was serious and sung in Latin, an ancient language that most people did not understand. Then some Catholic church leaders such as St. Francis of Assisi began urging people to sing joyful religious songs in their own language. The Catholic Church began putting on religious plays with music. Much of the music, such as “The First Noel,” is still popular today. Until about the 1500s, most winter holiday music written in Europe was about the birth of Christ. Some holiday songs were also written about feasting and celebrating. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**Drabble begins to sing: “Leon, Leon.” Then the other man flips the music sheet upside down as Drabble begins to sing “Noel, Noel.” *(Kevin Fagan ,in Drabble comic strip)***

**As the three of them look out the window together, Mom sings: “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas!” The child sings: “It’s beginning to look a lot like school might get canceled tomorrow!” And finally Dad sings: “It’s beginning to look a lot like I’m going to have to get up early to shovel the drive!” *(Art & Chip Sansom, in The Born Loser comic strip)***

**Dolly sings: “We wish you could marry Christmas, we wish you could marry Christmas!” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

**“Auld Lang Syne” means literally, “Old long since.” *(L. M. Boyd)***

**What an appropriate misprint in the church bulletin: “The choir will sing, ‘I Heard the Bills on Christmas Day.’” *(King Duncan & Angela Akers, in Amusing Grace, p. 347)***

**Around the 1930s, composers began writing new music for the holiday season. Much of the newer music does not have a religious meaning. Can you sing some of these newer holidays carols? “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town” “White Christmas” “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” “Frosty the Snowman” Holiday music is so popular that stars performing all kinds of music make best-selling CDs filled with the music of the season. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**“The Nutcracker” is the name for the ballet performed around Christmas time each year. “The Nutcracker Suite” is the title of the music Tchaikovsky wrote. *(absolutetrivia.com)***

**The oldest Christmas carol is “Angels We Have Heard on High,” I’m told. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Lewis H. Dedner, composer of the music to O Little Town of Bethlehem, claimed that the hymn’s melody came to him in a dream on Christmas Eve. Charles Wesley, author of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” (written in 1730), wrote a total of 6,000 hymns. He was inspired to write “Hark,” while listening to the pealing of bells as he walked to church one Christmas morning. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts)***

**A church choir was singing carols at a neighborhood shopping center, and at the entrance a sign read: “PARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING.” (Angie Papadakis, in Reader's Digest)**

**Christmas carols had another burst of popularity in the 1800s. Some of the best-loved carols sung today were written during that time. These include “Silent Night,” “Away in a Manger” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**The only person who ever presented an Oscar to himself was Irving Berlin. He opened the envelope for the Best Song of 1942 and announced, “Irving Berlin, for White Christmas.” He was momentarily nonplussed, but then he regained his composure and said, “I’m glad to present this award. I’ve known the fellow for a long time. He’s a nice kid and I think he deserves it.” *(Bits & Pieces)***

**Not many printers regard “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” as “their song.” But maybe they should. It was taken from a Mendelssohn cantata in praise of the printing press. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Clement C. Moore was teacher of classical languages. In the course of his career, he published a Hebrew dictionary and was a major benefactor of the General Theological Seminary in New York City. But it is not for the seminary or his dictionary that he is remembered. It is for a set of verses dashed off in 1822 in an hour of yuletide inspiration -- verses that he stuffed away as if of no importance. The magic lines begin: “Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house. . . .” They never brought Moore a penny, but they did bring him immortality. *(Dale Turner, in Reader’s Digest)***

**The Puritans forbade the singing of Christmas carols. *(David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 146)***

**Best- selling single records of all time:**

**1. White Christmas/Silent Night (Bing Crosby).**

**4. Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Gene Autry). *(Jerry Osborne, on Collectible Records)***

**Grandma says to Grandpa and his friend while the Christmas decorations lay all over the room: “God rest you merry gentlemen, because in about five minutes you’re going to be cleaning up this dump.” *(Brian Crane, in Pickles comic strip)***

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**“Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was written in 1939 by Bob May, an ad writer for a department store, Montgomery Ward. Experts believe he first made up the story of Rudolph for his 4-year-old daughter, Barbara. The head of Montgomery Ward bought all rights to the story and printed it to give to customers. Bob May’s wife had been very sick, and medical expenses made the family poor. So in 1946, the head of the company gave Bob May back all the rights to make money from the story. It made him rich. His brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, composed a tune to go with the story. Cowboy singer Gene Autry recorded it and made it a big hit. *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**The words to “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” were written – not for a song – but for a newspaper ad in 1939, by Robert May. Then, eight years later, Johnny Marks wrote music to those words. Marks and May tried to get someone to record it, but nobody would. Finally, Gene Autry agreed to put it on the flipside of a record – and to everyone’s surprise, “Rudolph” became one of the biggest hits in music history. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 90)***

**“Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was conceived by author Robert May in 1939. Two other names he considered before deciding on Rudolph were Reginald and Rollo. *(absolutetrivia.com)***

**The song “Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer” was created in 1939 in Chicago as a Christmas promotion for the Montgomery Ward department stores. The lyrics were written as a poem by Robert May, and weren’t set to music until 1947. Gene Autry recorded the hit song in 1949. *(Harry Bright & Harlan Briscoe, in So, Now You Know, p. 171)***

**Montgomery Ward copywriter Robert L. May introduced a reindeer with an unusual talent to American children when the store handed out more than two million copies of his story verse Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer in December 1939. Eight years later, Montgomery Ward gave May the rights to the tale of Rudolph’s foggy flight; the reindeer soared to the top of the music charts in 1949 after Gene Autry recorded a song about him written by May’s brother-in-law, Johnny Marks. An animated television special has aired annually since 1964, ensuring that Rudolph will “go down in his-tor-ee.” *(Alison McLean, in Smithsonian magazine)***

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**Who first sang “Santa Claus Is Comin’ to Town”? Eddie Cantor sang it on his radio show one week before Thanksgiving 1934. It was written in 1932 by Haven Gillespie and J. Fred Coots. *(Barbara Berliner, in The Book of Answers, p. 158)***

**Around the 1600s, a strict religious group, the Puritans, succeeded in stopping many people from singing holiday music in England and America. They didn’t think it was serious enough. But in the 1700s, carols became popular again. Some carol words written during that time include “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and “Joy to the World.” *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

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**Austria, of course, gave us that carol of carols, “Silent Night,” which owes its birth to an emergency. Just before Christmas, 1818, so the story goes, mice had eaten the organ bellows in the village church of Oberndorf, and a Christmas without music seemed inevitable. Undaunted, parish priest Joseph Mohr improvised the plain-spoken lyrics and asked his organist, Franz Gruber, to think up a simple tune for them which could be played on a guitar. *(Ernest O. Hauser, in Reader’s Digest)***

**On December 25, 1818, “Silent Night” was performed for the first time at the Church of St. Nikolaus in Oberndorff, Austria. In A.D. 336, the first recorded celebration of Christmas on December 25th took place in Rome. In 1223, St. Francis of Assisi assembled one of the first Nativity scenes in Greccio, Italy. *(Associated Press)***

**“Silent Night” was written as a last-minute replacement hymn in 1818. The organ at St. Nicholas’ Church at Oberndorf, Austria, was broken and wouldn’t be fixed in time for the Christmas service. Assistant priest, Joseph Mohr dug up an old poem he’d written and asked a friend of his, music teacher Franz Gruber, to write some music to accompany it that could be played on the guitar. On December 24, Gruber put the finishing touches on the song he’d entitled ‘Stille Nacht, Heilege Nacht (Silent Night, Holy Night).” *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

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**Ray Evans and Jay Livingston were prolific songwriters with such diverse titles as “Mona Lisa” and the theme song from “Mr. Ed” to their credit. They’re also responsible for the enduring holiday classic “Silver Bells,” which they wrote for the 1951 film The Lemon Drop Kid starring Bob Hope. The duo had originally intended to call their new song “Tinkle Bells,” until Livingston’s wife suggested they find a more appropriate title. In later years, after “Silver Bells” became the most-recorded modern Christmas carol, the writers referred to it simply as “The Annuity.” *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Wife says to husband: “I’m so behind! I’m not even finished decorating! I have more cards to address! More cookies to bake! More presents to buy! I’m a nervous wreck!” Husband then sings: “Oh it’s beginning to sound a lot like Christmas.” *(Kevin Fagan, in Drabble comic strip)***

**Son: “Here comes Santa Claus, here comes Santa Claus, right down Santa Claus lane. Bixen and Rixen dum diddle dum doo lum. Silent night, holy night, all is well, all is bright. Hum bum dum lum tum.” Father: “The first noel, the angels did sing. Twas to hummm uhm emm bluh. It’s the spirit, not the lyrics, that counts at Christmas.” *(The Buckets comic strip)***

**At a clearance sale, the wife of a federal district-court judge found the perfect green tie to match one of her husband’s sport jackets. Soon after, while the couple was relaxing at a resort complex to get his mind off a complicated cocaine-conspiracy case, he noticed a small, round disc sewn into the tie. The judge showed it to a local FBI agent, who was equally suspicious that it might be a “bug” planted by the conspiracy defendants. The agent sent the device to FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C., for analysis. Two weeks later, the judge phoned Washington to find out the results of their test. “We’re not sure where the disc came from,” the FBI told him, “but we discovered that when you press it, it plays ‘Jingle Bells.’” *(Sallie Kim, in Reader’s Digest)\***

**In the mid-1800s, an Anglican priest, Dr. John Mason Neale, translated more than 400 hymns into English and changed the music to make them easier to sing. Many of these hymns are sung as Christmas carols today. His carol translations include “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “Good King Wenceslas” and “Good Christmas Men, Rejoice.” *(Betty Debnam, in Rocky Mountain News)***

**Let’s take another look at the Christmas tree. If given a slight shake, the branches bounce and “clap their hands.” So it is with all creation: it sounds forth joy and applause for God’s amazing gift in the Christ Child. Let it be with us as well. Why should the trees have all the fun? As God says, “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace” (Isaiah 55:12). Let’s join all creation in giving thanks to God for our newborn King! *(Roger P. Theimer, in Portals of Prayer)***

**On one occasion a song temporarily halted a war, making neighbors out of enemies. That took place in France on Christmas Eve, 1914. At that time, British and German soldiers were huddled in muddy trenches mercilessly killing one another. Late on Christmas Eve, when the darkness made it impossible to continue shooting, an eerie calm descended. No doubt the young men in the trenches were thinking about home and family. Suddenly, a German soldier began to sing “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht.” Of course the British immediately recognized the tune as “Silent Night, Holy Night.” Spontaneously, several British soldiers began to join the German soldier. Little by little, more voices were added on both sides. Soon the battleground became common ground as the troops sang the great hymn in unison. What occurred next is one of the most extraordinary events in military history. One by one, soldiers on both sides put down their weapons and ventured into no-man’s-land to shake hands, exchange gifts, and sing more carols. When morning came, the war resumed when an order was issued forbidding contact with the enemy. “We are here to fight, not fraternize,” was the command. Nevertheless, for a brief moment, “Silent Night, Holy Night,” was the instrument which reminded two opposing forces that ultimate loyalty belongs neither to king nor kaiser, but to the Prince of Peace. *(Victor M. Parachin, in Unity magazine)***

**John Henry Hopkins, the first Bishop of Vermont, was a talented artist, musician, architect and attorney. In 1857, he wrote a song as a Christmas present for his nieces and nephews. The tune, called “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” told the story of Matthew 2:1-11). *(Tidbits of Loveland)***

**Irving Berlin wrote the song “White Christmas” for a movie called Holiday Inn. It was just one of the holiday songs Berlin wrote for that movie, but it became, by far, the most popular. Although “White Christmas” is one of the most-sung traditional Christmas songs, it dates only from that 1942 movie. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 49)***

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