

A Compilation of Classic English Christmas Carols: Musical and Lyrical Details

Detailing Ten Beloved Traditional Holiday Songs

This document serves as a comprehensive reference guide for ten of the most cherished and frequently performed Christmas carols in the English-speaking tradition. The selection focuses on enduring classics that span centuries, representing a rich blend of traditional English folk tunes, nineteenth-century hymns, and popular compositions.

The information presented includes:

- The **Full Lyrics** in their standard stanza format.
- The **Author(s)** and **Composer(s)**, where known.
- The **Approximate Year** of composition or first publication.
- The most **Common Scale or Key** used in modern arrangements.
- A list of the most **Common Chords** essential for performance.

These carols collectively define the soundscape of the winter holidays, bridging the sacred and the secular aspects of the season. Each entry is meticulously detailed to provide a complete understanding of its structure and history, ensuring accuracy for performance and study.

Compilation of song details for ten classic Christmas carols.
November 15, 2000.

1. Silent Night, Holy Night (Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht)

Author(s): Joseph Mohr (Lyrics), Franz Xaver Gruber (Music)

Year: 1818

Common Chords (G Major): G, C, D, Em

Stanza 1

Silent night, holy night,

All is calm, all is bright.

Round yon Virgin Mother and Child.

Holy Infant so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace.

Stanza 2

Silent night, holy night,

Shepherds quake at the sight;

Glories stream from heaven afar,

Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!

Christ the Savior is born,

Christ the Savior is born!

Stanza 3

Silent night, holy night,

Son of God, love's pure light.

Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

2. Jingle Bells

Author(s): James Lord Pierpont

Year: 1857

Common Chords (C Major): C, G, F

Verse 1

Dashing through the snow,
In a one-horse open sleigh,
O'er the fields we go,
Laughing all the way.
Bells on bobtails ring,
Making spirits bright,
What fun it is to ride and sing
A sleighing song tonight.

Chorus

Jingle bells, jingle bells,
Jingle all the way.
Oh! what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh.
Jingle bells, jingle bells,
Jingle all the way.
Oh! what fun it is to ride

In a one-horse open sleigh.

3. O Holy Night (Cantique de Noël)

Author(s): Placide Cappeau (Original French Lyrics), Adolphe Adam (Music), John Sullivan Dwight (English Translation)

Year: 1847

Common Chords (G Major): G, C, D, Em, Bm, F#7

Stanza 1

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!
O night divine, O night, O night Divine!

Stanza 2

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His Gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother,
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,

Let all within us praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord, O praise His name forever!
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim.

4. The First Noël

Author(s): Traditional English Carol

Year: c. 16th–17th Century

Common Chords (G Major): G, D, C⁴

Stanza 1

The first Noël, the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Chorus: Noël, Noël, Noël, Noël,

Born is the King of Israel.

Stanza 2

They looked up and saw a star,
Shining in the East beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.

Chorus: Noël, Noël, Noël, Noël,

Born is the King of Israel.

Stanza 3

And by the light of that same star,
Three wise men came from country far;

To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.

***Chorus: Noël, Noël, Noël, Noël,
Born is the King of Israel.***

5. We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Author(s): Traditional English Carol

Year: c. 16th Century

Common Chords (C Major): C, G, F, Em⁵

Stanza 1

We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas,

We wish you a merry Christmas,

And a happy New Year!

Stanza 2

Good tidings we bring

To you and your kin;

Good tidings for Christmas

And a happy New Year!

Stanza 3

We won't go until we get some,

We won't go until we get some,

We won't go until we get some,

So bring it right here!

Stanza 4

Good tidings we bring

To you and your kin;
Good tidings for Christmas
And a happy New Year!

6. Deck the Halls

Author(s): Traditional Welsh Carol, English Lyrics by Thomas Oliphant

Year: c. 18th Century

Common Chords (D Major): D, A7, G, Bm

Stanza 1

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

'Tis the season to be jolly,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Fill the meadcup, drain the barrel,

Fa la la, la la, la la la.

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Stanza 2

See the blazing Yule before us,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Strike the harp and join the chorus.

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Follow me in merry measure,

Fa la la, la la, la la la.

While I tell of Yuletide treasure,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Stanza 3

Fast away the old year passes,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses!

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Sing we joyous, all together,

Fa la la, la la, la la la.

Heedless of the wind and weather,

Fa la la la la, la la la la.

7. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Author(s): Charles Wesley (Lyrics), Felix Mendelssohn (Music Adapted)

Year: 1739 (Lyrics)

Common Chords (G Major): G, C, D, Am, E7

Stanza 1

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

Stanza 2

Christ, by highest Heav'n adored;
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as Man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

Stanza 3

Hail! the Heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die:
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

8. The Twelve Days of Christmas

Author(s): Traditional English Folk Song

Year: c. 18th Century

Common Chords (G Major): G, D, C, Em, Am⁸

(The song follows a cumulative pattern, where each stanza adds a new gift and repeats all previous gifts.)

Example Stanza 1

On the first day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

A partridge in a pear tree.

Example Stanza 2

On the second day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

Two turtle doves,

And a partridge in a pear tree.

Example Stanza 12 (Partial)

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me

Twelve drummers drumming,

Eleven pipers piping,

Ten lords a-leaping,

Nine ladies dancing,

Eight maids a-milking,

Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five gold rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

9. Away in a Manger

Author(s): Traditional (Often attributed to Martin Luther or James R. Murray)

Year: c. 1885

Common Chords (C Major): C, G, F

Stanza 1

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Stanza 2

The cattle are lowing, the poor Baby wakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus! look down from the sky,
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Stanza 3

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
And take us to Heaven to live with Thee there.

10. What Child is This?

Author(s): William Chatterton Dix (Lyrics), Traditional English Melody ("Greensleeves") (Music)

Year: 1865

Common Chords (A Minor/D Minor): Am, C, G, Em, F, Dm, E7

Stanza 1

What Child is this, who, laid to rest,

On Mary's lap is sleeping?

Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,

While shepherds watch are keeping?

Refrain: This, this is Christ the King;

Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:

Haste, haste to bring him laud,

The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Stanza 2

Why lies He in such mean estate,

Where ox and ass are feeding?

Good Christian, fear, for sinners here

The silent Word is pleading.

Refrain: This, this is Christ the King;

Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:

Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Stanza 3

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come, peasant, king, to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Refrain: This, this is Christ the King;
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

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