

# An English Folk Christmas

## Christmas cheer in songs and carols

Hearty songs and music for Christmas. Carol singers stamping their feet against the cold, and singing their hearts out. Songs and carols old and new in cheerful Christmas celebration, with amazing instrumental accompaniment on fiddles, melodeons, drums and pipes.

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|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Good King Wenceslas                 | 12 Hark, the herald angels sing! |
| 2 Wassail, wassail                    | 13 Silent night                  |
| 3 Lullay, lullow                      | 14 While shepherds watched       |
| 4 Deck the halls with boughs of holly | 15 Here we go a-wassailing       |
| 5 The first Nowell                    | 16 The holly bears a berry       |
| 6 God rest ye, merry gentlemen        | 17 Once in royal David's city    |
| 7 Tomorrow shall be my dancing day    | 18 We three kings                |
| 8 The seven joys of Mary              | 19 O little town of Bethlehem    |
| 9 Bright morning star                 | 20 The twelve days of Christmas  |
| 10 Joy to the world                   | 21 O come, all ye faithful       |
| 11 Ding dong merrily on high          |                                  |

Ian Giles *voice (soloist) and drum*

John Spiers *melodeon and tenor*

Jon Bowden *fiddle, and voice (soloist)*

Giles Lewin *fiddle, pipes, flute and voice*

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AN ENGLISH

*Folk Christmas*

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'I have often thought, says sir Roger, it happens very well that Christmas should fall in the Middle of Winter.' Joseph Addison *The Spectator* 8 (January 1712)

The wassail cup with steaming drink, the cold and frost of mid-winter revelry outdoors, at night, with only feeble lamps to guide the way; these are just some of the images we have of Christmas past, merged in our minds with our own carol singing days, trudging from door to door, through street and alley, singing of the joys of Christmas. In our mind's eye we can see the wassailers, stamping in the snow, sipping the occasional swig from a discrete flask – and singing, and playing with all their hearts, celebrating the joy of Christmas and of the New Year to come, with its promise of Springtime and new growth.

'Bah,' said Scrooge. 'Humbug!'

Charles Dickens *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

Scrooge was wrong, of course, as his story goes on to show, and this selection of cheery Christmas songs and carols would be enough to warm even the most

stubborn of hearts! Many old favourites are here, plus a few – even older, for the most part – which come from the ancient English folk song tradition. They are sung in traditional manner, with improvised accompaniment from either voices, or instruments. Even songs such as 'Silent Night' benefit from this treatment, and the performance we hear on this album is moving, its simplicity of style quite appropriate to the tune and its text.

Traditional sounds, traditional words and music, and performances by some of the finest folk musicians in England. Ian Giles is world-renowned for the power and tone of his rich voice. John Spiers and Jon Bowden are a well-known music duo, frequently heard on radio and on disc. Giles Lewin is an expert in playing many types of instruments. His fiddle duets with Bowden are inspiring and amusing in equal measure. Listen to the spring and lightness of 'Joy to the World', which the two instrumentalists turn into a super-Baroque style of piece with their 'divisions' and improvised variations on the tune all accompanied with style by Spiers and his melodeon. Bowden sings several solos as well, including 'O little town of Bethlehem', in which we can hear his distinctive voice, lighter and more urgent than that of Giles, whose musicality and panache can be frequently heard, as in 'Deck the halls'.