

NOTES OF INTEREST

The Mississinewa Valley Band Newsletter

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The Christmas Carol One of our Most-Loved Traditions

The birth of Jesus was celebrated by music: *“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* (Luke 2:13-14).

Christians of the 1st century continued the tradition of the angels. There are historical records from as early as 129 AD of songs written specifically for Christmas celebrations. These Christmas songs were primarily written in Latin, and were not called carols, but hymns.

The word carol comes from the French word *carole*, meaning circle dance, or song of praise and joy. The singing of carols did not originate with Christianity, but with the pagan practice of celebrating the seasons. The Winter Solstice celebration generally took place around the 22nd of December. It was this time of the year that the Christians claimed for their own celebration of the birth of Christ. Interestingly, although the pagan celebrations took place during all four seasons, only the winter celebration has survived - not as a pagan celebration of season, but as the Christian celebration of Christmas.

The majority of the first Christmas carols were written in Latin, which was understood only by members of the elite church-few. Because of this, by the Middle Ages, the majority of Christians lost interest in the singing of Christmas carols.

In 1223, St. Francis of Assisi revived an interest in Christmas and in the singing of carols. He started putting on musical plays in which the majority of the songs were written in the language of the common people. Because of his efforts, the singing of Christmas carols once again began to

spread throughout Europe. Most of these new carols were not based strictly on Scripture, but were simply light-hearted stories, sung by traveling minstrels and changed from town to town to fit the desires of various communities. These carols were rarely sung in church. Instead, the music resounded from the streets and in the homes.

Because the carols were not strictly Scriptural, and not written in Latin, there were those who considered them inappropriate. With the coming of the Puritans to England in 1647, the celebration of Christmas and the singing



of carols disappeared from church services altogether. The joy of Christmas and its music however, survived in secret.

During the Great Reformation (beginning in 1570), there was a revival of hymns, including the singing of Christmas carols in the language of the people. And although it would be many years before the Christmas carol would come into its own, new freedoms were coming to the common people, including the right to worship as they chose, and to sing music how, when and where they pleased.

During the Victorian era (1837-1901), two men by the names of William Sandys and Davis Gilbert published a collection of Christmas songs,

old and new from various villages in England. Thus, the singing of Christmas carols was revived. People began singing on the streets, in homes, in churches, for money and for free. The tradition of 'caroling' from home to home was born, along with the giving of alms (money, food, wassail, gifts) to the singers. In honor of the angels' announcement to the shepherds and of the star leading the wise men, the custom of lighting candles while singing on Christmas Eve was instituted.

The joy of music filled England once again and spread throughout Europe (and eventually to the New World). Old and new traditions of Christmas were freely celebrated, and people once again began to sing. The music of Christmas had refused to be silenced!

The songs that were once quieted because of fear and ignorance now sound out freely throughout much of the world, not only from Christian homes and churches, but also from elevators and skate parks and shopping mall sound systems. Even unbelievers enjoy the music and the sights; the lights and the trees. And although many of the traditions may have lost some of their original meaning, and in spite of the actual Saint Nicholas evolution into a jolly old elf, even the skeptics cannot deny the spirit of giving that prevails. Most everyone knows that Christmas time is somehow different from all the other seasons. No matter what style of music a person may choose to enjoy the rest of the year, the traditional Christmas carol breaks through the musical preferences and barriers, to be universally recognized as the most beloved music of all people of all times.

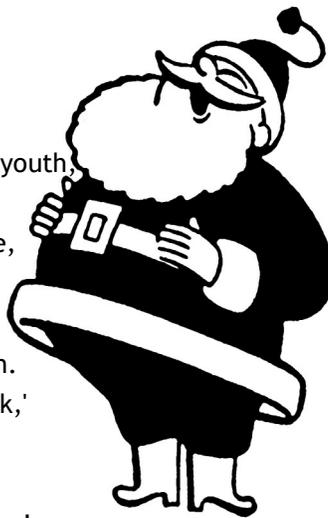
If you love great Christmas music, you won't want to miss the MVB's annual Yuletide at the Phillippe Happening on Tuesday, December 8 7:30 p.m. Phillippe Performing Arts Center Indiana Wesleyan University



There will be a great mixture of old and new favorites, special guests, And who knows... maybe even an appearance from the jolly old man in the red suit! As always, admission is free, and refreshments will be served.

Here's a new take on an old favorite . . .

'Twas the night before Christmas and out on the ranch
 The pond was froze over and so was the branch.
 The snow was piled up belly-deep to a mule.
 The kids were all home on vacation from school,
 And happier young folks you never did see-
 Just all sprawled around a-watchin' TV.
 Then suddenly, sometime around 8 o'clock,
 There came a surprise that gave them a shock!
 The power went off, the TV went dead!
 When Grandpa came in from out in the shed
 With an armload of wood, the house was all dark.
 'Just what I expected,' they heard him remark.
 'Them power line wires must be down from the snow.
 Seems sorter like times on the ranch long ago.'
 'I'll hunt up some candles,' said Mom. 'With their light,
 And the fireplace, I reckon we'll make out all right.'
 The teen-agers all seemed enveloped in gloom.
 Then Grandpa came back from a trip to his room,
 Uncased his old fiddle and started to play
 That old Christmas song about bells on a sleigh.
 Mom started to sing, and first thing they knew
 Both Pop and the kids were all singing it, too.
 They sang Christmas carols, they sang 'Holy Night,'
 Their eyes all a-shine in the ruddy firelight.
 They played some charades Mom recalled from her youth,
 And Pop read a passage from God's Book of Truth.
 They stayed up till midnight-and, would you believe,
 The youngsters agreed 'twas a fine Christmas Eve.
 Grandpa rose early, some time before dawn;
 And when the kids wakened, the power was back on.
 'The power company sure got the line repaired quick,'
 Said Grandpa - and no one suspected his trick.
 Last night, for the sake of some old-fashioned fun,
 He had pulled the main switch - the old Son-of-a-Gun!



"Lose some weight, quit smoking, move around more and eat the carrot."

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Contact the Director:

jbrane@embarqmail.com

Band Information:

bandmississinewavalley@gmail.com

Return Service Requested

Van Buren IN 46991
PO Box 321

MISSISSINEWA
Valley Band

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