

Simply Carols

Narration

Narrations may be performed by one person throughout, one person per narration, or one person per paragraph within each narration.



Sing We Now of Christmas / He Is Born **Traditional French Carols**

At Christmas time, everyone loves to hear the wonderful seasonal carols. One of the special joys of these songs is their rich history. Many are very old and teach us about holiday traditions in countries around the world.

In the French countryside in the early 16th century, many people lived and worked much as their ancestors had in the first century A.D. They identified with the shepherds and other common folk of the Christmas story, and their carols reflect this kinship.

One of the best-known French carols is the 16th-century song *He Is Born, or Il Est Né*. This song originated in the region of Provence and encourages people to celebrate the birth of the divine child with singing and the playing of flute and drum.

Sing We Now of Christmas is even older than *He Is Born*. Both of the words in its French title, *Noël Nouvelet*, refer to “news” or “newness.” In the late 15th century, this carol was sung for New Year’s celebrations. Eventually, Noël became the French word for “Christmas,” and this carol became a Christmas song that was translated into English in the 17th century.



The First Nowell / What Child Is This? **Traditional English Carols**

England has given us many musical treasures, including *The First Nowell*. Possibly dating back to the 13th century, it was first published in an English carol book in 1823. Like the French, the English referred to Christmas as “Nowell.” The lyrics tell the story of the shepherds and the wise men who, though living in different countries, saw the light of the same star, heralding the birth of Jesus.

Greensleeves was such a popular 16th-century English folk tune that Queen Elizabeth I danced to it, and Shakespeare mentioned it twice in his play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In 1865, William Dix wrote a Christmas poem, *What Child Is This?*, after suffering from a long illness. His text was set to the *Greensleeves* melody, and this carol has become an enduring Christmas favorite.



The Wexford Carol / The Snow Lay on the Ground **Traditional Irish Carols**

The Wexford Carol dates to the 12th century and comes from a county of the same name in Ireland. Over the years, the carol acquired many different verses of English and Irish origins, but all of them tell the story of the birth of the “princely babe” on Christmas morn. Like many Irish carols, this song contains an interesting mix of major and minor modes.

The Snow Lay on the Ground is an Irish carol of unknown origins. Its lilting refrain includes a Latin text, *Venite adoremus Dominum*, which means, “O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.” Although this Irish carol tune is the most popular melody, the text has been set to new melodies by numerous composers, including the famous 19th-century Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg.

The First Nowell / What Child Is This?

Traditional English Carols

Arranged by

Ruth Elaine Schram

④ Performance

Unison or Two-part

⑭ Accompaniment

With wonder ♩ = ca. 104

6 Unison

The first No -

10

well the an - gel did say was to cer - tain poor

14

shep - herds in fields as they lay; in fields where

18

they lay — keep - ing their sheep, on a cold win - ter's

22

poco rall. *a tempo*

night — that was — so deep. No - well, — No -

poco rall. *a tempo*

26

well, No - well, No - well, — born is the King — of

31

Part I (melody)

Is - ra - el. No - well, — No - well, No - well, — No -

Part II (optional)

Is - ra - el. No - well, — No - well, No - well, — No -

36 *poco rall.*

well, born is the King of Is - ra - el.

well, born is the King of Is - ra - el.

poco rall.

42 *a tempo* *mp*

*What child is

*What child is

mp a tempo

47

this who, laid to rest, on Ma - ry's lap is sleep -

this who, laid to rest, on Ma - ry's lap is sleep -

*TUNE: GREENSLEEVES; Words by William C. Dix, 1865.

53

ing? Whom an - gels greet _____ with an - thems sweet, while_

ing? An - gels greet, an - thems sweet,

58

shep - herds watch _____ are keep - ing? This,

shep - herds watch are keep - ing? This_ is,

63

this _____ is Christ the King, whom_ shep - herds guard _____ and

this_ is Christ the King, whom_ shep - herds guard _____ and

68

an - gels sing; Haste, haste_____ to bring him

an - gels sing; Haste_ to, haste_ to bring him

f

73

laud, the_ babe,_____ the son_____ of Ma - ry.

laud, the_ babe,_____ the son_____ of Ma - ry.

mf *poco rall.*

78

a tempo *mf*

No - well,_____ No -

mf

No - well,_____ No -

a tempo