

*Laughter and Libations:
A Pagan-Safe Songbook*



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Laugh'ter (laf ter) n. mere diversion of pleasure.

Li-ba-tion (lī bā'shen) n. the ritual pouring out of wine to honor a god.

By 1879 caroling was defined as “going around from place to place singing Christmas songs” and was thought to be a revival of an old English custom. This is not the case. In reality, caroling traces its origin back to the Old French carole, “a kind round dance accompanied by singers,” (c. 1300.) Those who did the singing and dancing, carolers, owe their moniker to the root word carl (n.) “bondsmen; a common man of low birth,” from the Old Norse karl, meaning “man.”

When the housecarls went carousing, bawdy drinking songs ensued. It is not hard to imagine the lords and ladies of the manner eagerly offering them a cup of whatever was on hand just to get them to take their signing and dancing elsewhere.

The aim of *Laughter and Libations* is to trace common carols back to their less than pious roots, revving their original intent, which was to celebrate feasting and fornicating, drinking and dancing. This guide is divided into three sections: 1) Traditional Treasures, which provides history and original lyrics of the carols, 2) Simple Substitutions, showing how to change a Christmas carol into one celebrating Yule, Saturnalia, or what-have-you, and 3) Ridiculous Rewrites, which contains Christmas hymns for which there are no other existing lyrics, rewritten in a Pagan-Safe form.

In addition to popular carols, recipes for common winter beverages are included to enhance the spirits of the revilers.



Drink and be Merry!

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I. Traditional Treasurers



Deck the Halls

The melody of “Deck the Halls” is taken from “Nos Galan,” a traditional Welsh New Year's Eve carol published in 1794. However, the repeated "fa la la" traces its roots even further back to medieval Welsh ballads. Nos Galan translates as New Year's Eve, so this song was not originally intended for use as a Christmas hymn.

The Welsh lyrics (and translation) are as follows:

Goreu pleser ar nos galan,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
Tŷ a than a theulu diddan,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
Calon lân a chwyrw melyn,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
Pennill mwyn a llais y Delyn
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:

O mor gynnes mynwes meinwen,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
O mor fwyn yw llwyn meillionen,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
O mor felus yw'r cusanau,

[instrumental flourish]

Gyda serch a mwynion eiriau
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:

The best pleasure on new year's eve,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
Is house and fire and a pleasant family,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
A pure heart and brown ale,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
A gentle song and the voice of the harp
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:

Oh! how soft my fair one's bosom,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
Oh! how sweet the grove in blossom,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:
Oh! how blessed are the blisses,

[instrumental flourish]

Words of love, and mutual kisses,
Fal lal lal lal lal lal lal la:

The English lyrics of Nos Galan were written by Scottish musician Thomas Oliphant, first appearing in 1862, in volume 2 of *Welsh Melodies*. In the original publication, Oliphant's English lyrics were published alongside Talhaiarn's Welsh lyrics. A further variation in English cropped up in America, first appearing in the December 1877 issue of the *Pennsylvania School Journal*. That version eliminated all references to drinking. Another common alteration was exchanging “Christmas” and “Yuletide,” so Pagan revilers today can feel free to do the same.

Thomas Oliphant’s version:

Deck the hall with boughs of holly,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
’Tis the season to be jolly,
Fa, 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!

See the flowing bowl before us,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Strike the harp and join the chorus.
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Follow me in merry measure,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
While I sing of beauty's treasure,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

Fast away the old year passes,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses!
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Laughing, quaffing all together,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Heedless of the wind and weather,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

***Pennsylvania School Journal* version:**

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
’Tis the season to be jolly,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Don we now our gay apparel,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Troll the ancient Christmas carol,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

See the **blazing yule** before us,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Strike the harp and join the chorus.
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Follow me in merry measure,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
While I tell of Christmas treasure,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

Fast away the old year passes,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses!
Fa, 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!

Because the previous song features the meadcup, barrel, and flowing bowl, a recipe for mead is in order. A good source for old mead recipes is a 17th century book titled, "The Closet of Sir Kenelm Digby Knight Opened" by Kenelm Digby. This book can be download for free from the gutenberg.org website.

MEAD

1 quart raw honey
4 quarts water
1 lb raisins (dried cranberries, cherries, currents, etc, can be substituted.)

Warm water in a clean kettle. As soon as the water is warm, add the honey, and let it boil. Skim off any froth that rises to the surface.

Add raisins and let them remain in the boiling liquor, until they are thoroughly swollen and soft. Remove the raisins; put them in a doubled cheesecloth bag, straining the juice and pulp from them. Return the liquid to the kettle and let it boil, until it is reduced by one-quarter. Let the liquor cool overnight.

Put the liquor into a clean fermentation bucket, covered with cheesecloth, and let it sit for six weeks. Once the fermentation process is complete, bottle the remaining liquid and store it for nine months before drinking.

This recipe yields one gallon of mead.

*NOTE: This recipe does not call for yeast because 17th century kitchens had an abundance of naturally occurring yeast which would make its way into the barrel. Thanks to the miracle of bleach, kitchens are much cleaner today. If you fear your kitchen may be too sanitary to house naturally occurring yeast spores, feel free to add a packet of Fleischmann's yeast to the mix to get the fermentation started.

One Horse Open Sleigh

Jingle Bells, written by James Lord Pierpont, was copyrighted on September 16, 1857 as “One Horse Open Sleigh.” Originally a drinking song, it was written in commemoration of the annual Thanksgiving sleigh races in Medford, Massachusetts. Tavern goers were supposed to jingle the ice in their glasses while singing and the double meaning of ‘upsot’ was thought to be humorous.

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

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Jingle all the way,
Oh what fun it is to ride
in a one horse open sleigh.

A day or two ago,
I thought I'd take a ride,
And soon Miss Fanny Bright,
Was seated by my side.
The horse was lean and lank,
Misfortune seemed his lot,
He got into a drifted back,
And we got upsot!

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Jingle all the way,
Oh what fun it is to ride
in a one horse open sleigh.

A day or two ago,
A story I must tell,
I went out in the snow,
And on my back I fell.
A gent was riding by,
In a one horse open sleigh,
He laughed as there I sprawling lie,
But quickly drove away.

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Jingle all the way,
Oh what fun it is to ride
in a one horse open sleigh.

Now, the ground is white,
So go it while you're young.
Take the girls tonight,
And sing this sleighing song.
Just get a bobtailed bay,
Two-forty for his speed,
Hitch him to an open sleigh,
And Crack! You'll take the lead.

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells,
Jingle all the way,
Oh what fun it is to ride
in a one horse open sleigh.

Tempus adest floridum (Good King Wenselas)

The carol, “Good King Wenceslas,” as sung today, is the story of a Bohemian king braving inclement weather to give alms to the poor on the Feast of Steven (December 26th.) English hymnwriter John Mason Neale wrote the lyrics in collaboration with music editor, Reverend Thomas Helmore in 1853. However, these are not the original lyrics.

Neale’s lyrics were set to the melody of “Tempus adest floridum,” (PC 74) a song dating to the 13th century. The “Tempus adest floridum” was published in *Piae Cantiones*, a 1582 Finnish song collection, which was gifted to Neale by G. J. R. Gordon, who was Queen Victoria’s envoy in Stockholm, Sweden.

There are two known versions of “Tempus adest floridum” (It is time for flowering.) Neale’s lyrics are based off the *Piae Cantiones* 1582 version. Another version, dating to the 11th or 12th centuries was published in the *Carmina Burana*, (CB 142) a German manuscript containing poems and dramatic text, which were mostly bawdy, irreverent, and satirical. The major difference between the two texts is that the PC 74 version contains a verse focusing praising the Lord, which seems out of place in context of the rest of the song, whereas the CB 142 verse references “playing the game of Venus” in the meadow.

PC 74 verse (13th Century)

Haec vobis pulchre monstrant Deum
creatorem
Quem quoque nos credimus omnium
factorem
O tempus ergo hilare, quo laetari libet
Renovato nam mundo, nos novari decet.

Through each wonder of fair days God
Himself expresses;
Beauty follows all His ways, as the world He
blesses:
So, as He renews the earth, Artist without
rival,
In His grace of glad new birth we must seek
revival.

CB 142 verse (11th Century)

Stant prata plena floribus, in quibus nos
ludamus!
Virgines cum clericis simul procedamus,
Per amorem Veneris ludum faciamus,
ceteris virginibus ut hoc referamus!

The fields in which we play are full of flowers!
Maidens and clerks, let us go out together,
Let us play for the love of Venus,
That we may teach the other maidens!

The CB 142 version, German translated to Latin, then translated into English, loses much of its singability, so I have included an English translation of “Tempus adest floridum,” PC 74, with one change. In place of the verse praising God, I have written in a singable version of the love scene among the flowers as mentioned in the *Carmina Burana*.

Spring has now unwrapped the flowers, day is fast reviving,
Life in all her growing powers towards the light is striving:
Gone the iron touch of cold, winter time and frost time,
Seedlings, working through the mould, now make up for lost time.

Herb and plant that, winter long, slumbered at their leisure,
Now bestirring, green and strong, find in growth their pleasure;
All the world with beauty fills, gold the green enhancing,
Flowers make glee among the hills, set the meadows dancing.

Maids bare their flesh and pour the wine, indulging sweet caresses.
Beauty follows carnal ways, as the world she blesses.
Maid and consort, forth they went, frolicking in fair weather.
Joyfully tumbling, maid and gent, on a bed of heather.

Earth puts on her dress of glee; flowers and grasses hide her;
We go forth in charity—Lovers all beside her;
For, as man this glory sees in th'awakening season,
Reason learns the heart's decrees, hearts are led by reason.

The Contest of the Holly and the Ivy

While the version of the carol popular today mentions Mary and Jesus, an earlier mention of the carol's title occurs in William Hone's 1823 work, *Ancient Mysteries Described*. The original manuscript, a contest between the traditional emblems of women and men, respectively, now resides in the British Museum.

In Pagan religions, holly symbolizes the god (male aspect) and ivy symbolizes the goddess (female aspect). The ancient Celts believed holly trees were the winter abode of dryads (dancing wood sprites.) An old charm tells maidens to pluck a leaf of ivy and hold it close to her heart to divine the identity of her future husband. Both plants are associated with the winter solstice.

Holly stands in the hall, fair to behold:
Ivy stands without the door, she is full sore a cold.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

Holly and his merry men, they dance and they sing,
Ivy and her maidens, they weep and they wring.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

Ivy hath chapped fingers, she caught them from the cold,
So might they all have, aye, that with ivy hold.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

Holly hath berries red as any rose,
The forester, the hunter, keep them from the does.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

Ivy hath berries black as any sloe;
There come the owl and eat him as she go.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

Holly hath birds a fair full flock,
The nightingale, the popinjay, the gentle laverock.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

Good ivy, what birds hast thou?
None but the owlet that cries how, how.
Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be I wis;
Let holly have the mastery, as the manner is.

The Wassail Song

Wassail is a warm alcoholic drink whose base consists of hot-mulled cider. The drink is traditionally associated with wassailing, a ritual to ensure a good harvest. Wassailers would stop at the land owner's house to refill their cups, and then consume the liquor while wandering through the orchards singing amongst the trees. Given the reference of singing "among the leaves so green" this ritual was likely preformed at the Vernal Equinox or Beltane, not Yule, when the trees would be bare. How this tune became associated with Christmas is a mystery.

WASSAIL RECIPIE

2 quarts apple cider
2 quarts cranberry juice
½ cup raw honey
5 cinnamon sticks (approx. 3 inches long, each)
2 dozen cloves
2 dozen allspice
2 granny smith apples
2 cups apple brandy such as Calvados

In a large stock pot combine cider, cranberry juice, and honey. Make a spice bag by tying the cinnamon sticks, cloves, and allspice in a piece of cheese cloth and add to juice mixture. Bring to a boil, skimming off froth as necessary. Reduce heat to simmer. Half the apples, remove cores, and thinly slice before adding to pot. Simmer 10 min. Add brandy and serve warm.

Here we come a-wassailing,
Among the leaves so green.
Here we come a wandering,
So fair to be seen.

REFRAIN

*Love and joy unto you,
And to your wassail, too.
Goddess bless you and send you a happy new year.
Goddess send you a happy new year.*

We are not daily beggars
Who beg from door to door,
But we are neighboring kinfolk
Who you have seen before.

REFRAIN

Gentle Lady of this house,
Who wears a golden ring,
Let her bring us a glass of wassail

And we shall better sing.
REFRAIN

We have got a little purse
Of stretching leathers skin;
We want a little of your money
to line it well within.

REFRAIN

Bless the Master of this house,
Likewise the Mistress too,
And all the little children
That 'round the table go.

REFRAIN

Good Master and Good Mistress
While sitting by the fire,
Think of us poor beggars,
a-wandering in the mire.

REFRAIN

II. Simple Substitutions



I'll be Home for Christmas

Most Christians don't realize that Yule is a Pagan holiday associated with pre-Christian Germanic peoples and involves Odin leading everyone on a wild hunt. Substituting 'Christmas' with solstice or Yuletide leaves other carolers thinking you're simply singing an alternate version of a song. A good example of how this works, is the carol, "I'll be Home for Christmas," recorded by Bing Crosby in 1943.

I'll be home for ~~Christmas~~ Yuletide,
You can plan on me.
Please have snow and mistletoe,
And presents on the tree.
~~Christmas~~ Solstice Eve will find me,
Where the love light gleams.
I'll be home for ~~Christmas~~ Yuletide,
If only in my dreams.

I'll be home for ~~Christmas~~ Yuletide,
You can plan on me.
Please have snow and mistletoe,
And presents on the tree.
~~Christmas~~ Solstice Eve will find me,
Where the love light gleams.
I'll be home for ~~Christmas~~ Yuletide,
If only in my dreams.
If only in my dreams.

III. Ridiculous Rewrites



Hark! The Drunken Pagans Sing (Hark! the Herald Angles Sing)

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” is a Christmas carol which first appeared in 1739, in the collection *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, written by Charles Wesley. It has no other origins and was originally written for Christmastide, hence the necessity of the rewrite appearing below.

Hark! The drunken Pagans sing,
Glory to the Holly King.
Peace on Earth and mercy mild,
God and Goddess reconciled.
Joyful all our deities rise,
Dancing naked under dark skies.
Witch and Pagan both proclaim,
The sun's reborn to rise again.

Hark! The drunken Pagans sing,
Glory to the Holly King.

Oak by highest order adored,
Oak the everlasting lord,
Longing for spring to see him come,
Acorn of the favored one.
Verdant and fresh for Goddess to see,
Hail our glorious deity.
Pleased as men with women to dwell,
Sensuous appetites to quell.

Hark! The drunken Pagans sing,
Glory to the Holly King.

Hail the winter-born sun entreats,
Hail the sun of rightfulness,
Light and life to all it brings,
Whispering tidings of coming spring.
In winter he lays his glory by,
Born in dark, in dark to die.
Born to bring warmth to earth.
Born during the moon of birch.

Hark! The drunken Pagans sing,
Glory to the Holly King.

To facilitate the drunkenness of pagans, below is an assortment of punch recipes.

PUNCH

Blood-Rum Punch

1 (750 ml) bottle of sparkling white wine, chilled.
3 cups blood-orange juice
1 cup amber rum
1 blood-orange thinly sliced
Ice

Stir together all ingredients in a pitcher, add ice, and serve.

Cranberry Cocktail Punch

6 cups frozen cranberries
2 cups sugar
1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, finely chopped
4 cups water
1 (750 ml) bottle of vodka
Fresh rosemary sprigs
Ice

Simmer cranberries, sugar, and rosemary in water until berries burst. Pour resulting syrup through a fine mesh sieve and discard berries. Chill syrup uncovered 4 hours. In a pitcher stir together syrup and vodka, then add ice. Garnish with rosemary sprigs.

Ginger Pineapple Punch

1 ½ cups water
1 cup sugar
1 cup fresh ginger, unpeeled and thinly sliced.
3 cups pineapple juice
1/3 cup lemon juice
1/3 cup lime juice
3 cups sparkling water, chilled
1 lemon thinly sliced
1 lime thinly sliced
Ice

Bring water, sugar, and ginger to a boil, stirring until sugar is dissolved. Simmer uncovered 10 min. stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and let seep 15 min. Pour syrup through fine mesh sieve and discard ginger. Chill covered for 4 hours. In a punch bowl stir together syrup, juice, and sparkling water, then add fruit slices and ice.

Pagans we have Heard get High (*Gloria in excelsis Deo*)

The Bach Cantata 191, “Gloria in excelsis Deo,” dating to 1745, is so obviously Christian that serious re-writing was necessary to make it singable. This version doesn’t have a thing to do with the solstice or Yuletide, but is fun none-the-less.

Pagans we have heard get high,
Secretly token o’re the plains,
And the mountain states in reply,
Echoing their joyous strains.

In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.
In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.

Legislatures now in jubilee,
With dope taxes to proclaim,
Budgets balanced, yes they be,
Increasing pot sales is our aim.

In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.
In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.

Come to Washington and see,
The evergreen state where pot is king,
Adore Colorado on bended knee,
Rocky Mountain High has a new meaning.

In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.
In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.

My woman’s to uptight to get laid,
With a booty worthy of praise.
Mary Jane lend your aid,
With my heart I solemnly beg.

In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.
In Colorado . . . and Washington we get stoned.

Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland

While there is nothing remotely ‘Christmassy’ about Felix Bernard (music) and Richard B. Smith’s (lyrics) original *Walking in a Winter Wonderland*. Published in 1934, the tune is, regrettably, still under copyright, and thus cannot be reprinted here. To makeup for that lack, the rewrite below should serve in its place.

Pagans sing, are ya’ listenin’
Altars set, candles glisten,
It’s a beautiful sight, a magical night,
Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland.

Blades held high, censer smokin’
Gather ‘round, we’re invokin’.
With elements five, we celebrate life,
Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland.

After circle we can light a Yule blaze,
And await the rising of the sun.
Wheel of power turns as winter’s dark days,
Grow lighter until spring-time has begun.

Later on, by the fire,
Crone of Power, getting higher,
It’s a beautiful sight, a magical night,
Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland.

In the meadow we can build a snowman,
And joy and laughter surly will abound.
We’ll have lots of fun because, ya’ know man,
The solstice is the best gig in town.

Celebrating the solstice sure is thrilling,
Though your nose gets a chilling.
We’ll frolic and play, the Pagan way,
Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland.

Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland.
Walking in a Wiccan Wonderland.