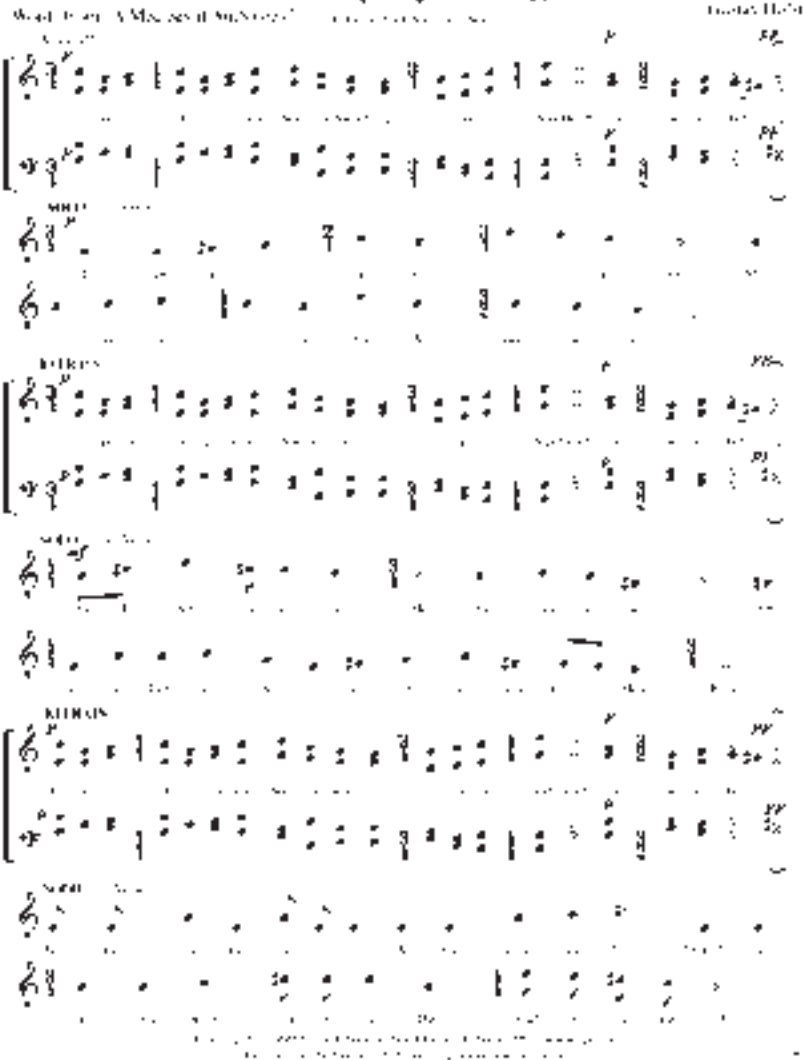


Lullay my Liking

Wendell Pears, A.M.S., and M. N. G. 1977. Lullay my Liking. The British Musical Heritage Society.



The musical score is for 'Lullay my Liking' by Gustav Holst. It is a three-part setting for voice and piano. The score is written in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal part (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor) and a piano accompaniment. The piece is in a simple, folk-like style with a clear melody and a steady rhythm. The score is arranged in three systems, each with a vocal part and a piano part. The first system is the introduction, the second is the main body of the piece, and the third is the conclusion. The score is written in a clear, legible hand, and the piano part is simple and unobtrusive, allowing the vocal melody to shine.

Lullay my Liking, Gustav Holst

There is one carol by Holst that does not exist in a set: *Lullay my Liking* for unaccompanied chorus. Like other carols, the text is medieval. Changing meters help accommodate natural text stress. With the exception of the chorus's fourth verse, the other verses are sung as a solo, and the choir answers with the refrain "Lullay my liking, my dear Son..." This piece is also very accessible for an amateur chorus, as the refrain remains unchanged throughout the work.

Benjamin Britten

It was during the 1942 wartime months of March and April that Britten (1913–1976) wrote, while on board the ship that was taking him from America back home to England, *A Ceremony of Carols*.¹² Scored for treble voices—three parts to be exact—and harp, the work is powerful in its simplicity.

One aspect of simplicity is the accompaniment of a single instrument, the harp. One of the first instruments mentioned in the Bible, the harp has been the symbol of the psalmists, the heavenly host of angels, and serenity. Britten was planning on a harp concerto around this time; harp manuals were just a few of the books he had on his nautical voyage. However, despite the pleasurable sonorities from the harp that audiences have enjoyed for decades, this was not the case initially. "The use of the harp as an accompanying instrument in this context was considered radical at the time of the première."¹³

The simplicity is also instantly audible from the first and last movement. Plain-song settings form the musical pillars to the eleven movements. Here, Britten chose *Hodie Christus natus est* from the Christmas Eve Vespers to serve as a musical processional and recessional. The processional and recessional are both in A major, a key Bach often used for its Trinitarian symbolism in the key signature.

With such careful musical architecture, it is not surprising that the middle movement be solely devoted to the harp. In true pastoral fashion, the rhythm is a compound (12/8) meter. More interesting is the choice of key. Where the traditional pastoral key would be F major, Britten chooses the equidistant enharmonic equivalent, the tri-tone (C-flat

major). The piece ends on the dominant F-flat, minus the third—a common medieval device.

A final aspect of simplicity is the choice of voices and the way they are set. The sound of a child's voice, and their presence on stage, can create a sense of innocence and purity synonymous with simplicity. Musically, Britten was always careful when he wrote for children. Although the music often sounds complex, Britten generally used the technique of canon as a way to produce polyphony. What better way to produce the feeling of timelessness than with canon—where a melody could continue *ad infinitum* if need be? The most oft-performed extracted movement is *This Little Babe*, a perfect example of Britten's canonic writing for children's voices.



Benjamin Britten, skiing holiday, early 1960s (© Britten-Pears Foundation)

John Rutter

Perhaps the most frequently performed carol arrangements are those of John Rutter. Born in London in 1945, Rutter is arguably the most prolific and published composer of carols in the twentieth century, not only in England but also around the world. In Oxford's *100 Carols for Choirs*, nearly thirty carols are by him. There are simply far too many carols by Rutter to discuss here. However, some examples show his connection to the past while writing in a modern romantic language.

"Joy to the World" is one of the most common carols in the Western hemisphere. Rutter could not have chosen a carol with more links to England's past than this one. The text is by Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and the original tune by Lowell Mason (1792–1872). Rutter modeled the accompaniment for the carol from the orchestral writing of Handel. Complete with descant, the Handelian orchestration to Lowell Mason's tune on John Wesley's text is one of Oxford University Press's most rented carols during the Christmas season.

Rutter wrote several other carols for chorus with orchestra or organ: *Wexford Carol*, *Jesus Child*, *Donkey Carol*, *Angel's Carol*, *Nativity Carol*, *Star Carol*, *Candlelight Carol*, *Shepherd's Pipe Carol*, and others. It is arrangements like *Candlelight Carol*, which can be classified as both a carol and an anthem, that have made Rutter a wealthy man. They contain the qualities necessary for any carol—a verse followed by a refrain, or *burden*.

In addition, the melodies and their respective accompaniments tend to be very sweet-sounding and melodious.



John Rutter (© Oxford University Press)

It is this latter trait that has brought Rutter fame and fortune. In this music one can hear the influence of Fauré-like orchestration, Vaughan Williams-inspired melodies, and the often-used flattened seventh that is so common in popular music.

Many of the above-listed carols are Rutter originals. As in *Shepherd's Pipe Carol*, for example, both the music and the text are by Rutter. The same is true of *Jesus Child*, *Donkey Carol*, *Angel's Carol*, *Nativity Carol*, *Star Carol*, and *Candlelight Carol*. Of the composers discussed thus far, none wrote as many original texts and tunes as Rutter. His contributions to the carol genre alone have brought significant attention to the choral world.

Herbert Howells

No discussion of the English carol would seem complete without mentioning *A Spotless Rose* by Herbert Howells (1892–1983). Herbert Howells wrote the piece,

After idly watching some shunting from the window of a cottage...in Gloucester which overlooked the Midland Railway. In an upstairs room I looked out on iron railings and the main Bristol-Gloucester railway line, with shunting trucks bumping and banging. I wrote it for and dedicated it to my Mother—it always moves me when I hear it, just as if it were written by someone else.¹⁴

With its parallel thirds and fourths, the piece evokes a sort of impressionistic quality. The irregular meters (3/4, 7/8, 5/4, 5/8, etc.) give the piece a fluidity of plainsong-like phrases not found in other carols. The fourteenth-century text also



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Herbert Howells (Reproduced by kind permission of the Herbert Howells Society)



Ralph Vaughan Williams (© The Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust)

provides a subtly respectful timelessness to the piece. *A Spotless Rose* is mostly in four parts except at cadences where it breaks into five or, in the case of the final cadence, six parts. It is this final cadence that was much beloved by Vaughan Williams and Patrick Hadley. Since the work's creation (1919), Howells received a postcard every Christmas thereafter from Patrick Hadley that contained the cadence and these words, "Oh Herbert! That cadence!"¹⁵

Summary

Holst, Britten, and Rutter represent the carol in their own unique way. Each had a distinct musical vocabulary that can be heard in their music. Some used the traditional approach of setting plainsong to their own time. Others, especially Rutter, have set melodies that are distinctly their own. Nearly every composer, it would seem, has taken a traditional carol and adapted a "modern" accompaniment to the otherwise traditional melody.

In terms of texts, it would be difficult to find an English composer who never set an already established text. From these examples, it is clear that the medieval carol is among the more popular. Rutter, although there are others not listed here, chose to write melodies and accompaniments to his own texts.

Carols functioned as a social outlet, as *Poor Robin's Almanac* illustrates. Interestingly enough, although mention is made of Jesus, plenty is also made of food and drink. Like folksong, carols were for the people. It is for this reason that they continued to exist outside church walls.

Carols were also devotional. For those who had their own private chapel, one could find them being sung there. In the parish church, it would take the efforts of the Victorians to regiment them as part of the liturgical service. It would not be until 1918 that the entire world would be affected by the Nine Lessons and Carols service at King's College, Cambridge, which is perhaps the most influential reason for the popularity of the carol today.

Besides being both social and devotional, carols have served as sparkling gems in choral concerts. Carols are "art music." Like many things throughout history, it is the way in which something is used that gives it definition. It does not seem out of place when a carol is sung in a secular location or by a secular ensemble. They exist for the betterment of music as a whole. Therefore, in this case the carol would be more closely linked with the social classification. As a result, the carol is one of those enigmatic genres that exist both liturgically and secularly—neither side taking issue with the other.

The main reason why the carol can dually exist is its simplicity. There is nothing to muddy the waters and create controversy, even when the subject matter is based on religious/biblical themes. Composers throughout the twentieth century in England managed to evoke their own voice while remaining true to the inherent simplistic quality of the carol.

Holst's simplicity came as a result of the element crucial to the carol: the people. He wrote for them. Simple melodies, textures, and accompaniments

meant that nearly every amateur could be an integral part of the carol tradition. Through simplicity of text, voicing, and accompaniment, Britten created his own form of simplicity. Rutter's simplicity is in the way the music sounds. It is so very easy to listen to (the same cannot necessarily be said about singing or playing them!).

Following the Victorian rediscovery (and regimentation) of the English carol dating from the Middle Ages, the carol tradition in England remained strong and thrived under several great composers: Holst, Britten, and Rutter among the more well-known. Through their carols, they presented the carol through use of traditional qualities (plainsong, medieval texts, and the like) while infusing their own musical language, aligning themselves in the great carol tradition. With the carol's multiple characteristics, it was and remains an enigmatic genre that is social, devotional, and art music, separately and all in one. With the inception of what is perhaps the greatest advocate of the carol, the *Service of Nine Lessons and Carols*, English composers have provided the means for the carol genre to thrive, all over the world, for centuries and millennia to come. ■

Notes

1. "Manichaeism is the largest and most important example of Gnosticism. Central in the Manichaean teaching was dualism, that the world itself, and all creatures, was part of a battle between the good, represented by God, and the bad, the darkness, represented by a power driven by envy and lust. These two powers were independent from each other, but in the world they were mixed. Most human beings were built from material from the bad power, but in everyone there was a divine light, which needed to be released from the dark material of the body. In Manichaeism creation is regarded as a cosmic catastrophe, this even applies to man" <<http://i-cias.com/e.o/manichae.htm>>. (Thursday, August 18, 2005). As a result, Manichaeism denied the Virgin Birth, which is in direct opposition to the doctrine of the Incarnation. Manichaeism died out by the fourteenth century.
2. William J. Phillips, *Carols: Their Origin, Music, and Connection with Mystery-Plays* (London: Geo. Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1921), 3.
3. Richard Long, *The Music of the English Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 26–27.
4. Phillips, *Carols*, 118.
5. Ibid., 119.
6. Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott, eds., *The New Oxford Book of Carols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xx.
7. The Oxford Movement gave rise to the "Anglo-Catholics," who reintroduced the practice of vestments, surplices, genuflection, use of holy water, and other "high-church" rituals.
8. Keyte and Parrott, xxi.
9. The cottage now bears the name "Midwinter Cottage."

10. Imogen Holst, *The Music of Gustav Holst and Holst's Music Revisited*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14.
11. Ibid., 45.
12. Britten also wrote the *Hymn to St. Cecilia* during this five-week voyage.
13. Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 281.
14. Paul Spicer, *Herbert Howells* (Bridgend, Wales: Poetry Wales Press Ltd, 1998), 67.
15. Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells* (Kent: Novello, 1978), 74.

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