

Benjamin Britten: A Ceremony of Carols (Text and Selective Translations)

ProceSSIONAL

Hodie Christus natus est:
Hodie Salvator apparuit:
Hodie in terra canunt angeli:
Laetantur archangeli:
Hodie exsultant justi dicentes:
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Wolcum Yole! (Anon. 14th Century)

Wolcum, Wolcum, Wolcum be thou hevenè king,
Wolcum Yole! Wolcum, born in one morning,
Wolcum for whom we sall sing!
Wolcum be ye, Stevene and Jon,
Wolcum, Innocentes every one,
Wolcum, Thomas marter one,
Wolcum be ye, good Newe Yere,
Wolcum, Twelfthe Day both in fere,
Wolcum, seintes lefe and dere,
Wolcum Yole, Wolcum Yole, Wolcum!
Candelmesse, Quene of bliss,
Wolcum bothe to more and lesse.
Wolcum, Wolcum, Wolcum be ye that are here,
Wolcum Yole, Wolcum alle and make good cheer,
Wolcum alle another yere, Wolcum Yole, Wolcum!

There is no Rose (Anon. 14th Century)

There is no rose of such vertu as is the rose that bare Jesu.
Alleluia, alleluia.
For in this rose containèd was heaven and earth in litel space,
Res miranda, res miranda.
By that rose we may well see there be one God in persons three,
Pares forma, pares forma,
The aungels sungen the shepherds to:
Gloria in excelsis,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Gaudeamus, gaudeamus.
Leave we all this werldly mirth, and follow we this joyful birth.
Transeamus, transeamus, transeamus.
Alleluia, res miranda, pares forma, gaudeamus,
Transeamus, transeamus, transeamus.

*Today Christ is born:
Today the Saviour has appeared:
Today angels sing on earth:
Archangels rejoice:
Today the righteous exult, saying:
Glory to God in the highest.
Alleluia!*

Wolcum = *Welcome*; hevenè = *heavenly*
Yole = *Yule* (the midwinter festival)
sall = *shall*

marter = *martyr*

fere = *fear*
seintes lefe and dere = *saints left and dear*

Candelmesse = *Candlemas*

vertu = *virtue*

litel = *little*
res miranda = *miraculous thing*

pares forma = *in the parent's image*
the aungels sungen = *the angels sang*

gaudeamus = *we rejoice*
werldly = *worldly*
transeamus = *we follow*

That Yongë Childe and Bulalow

(Anon. 14th Century . . . James, John & Robert Wedderburn, 16th Century)

That yongë child when it gan weep with song she lulled him asleep:
That was so sweet a melody it passèd alle minstrelsy.
The nightingalë sang also: Her song is hoarse . . . and nought thereto:
Whoso attendeth to her song and leaveth the first . . . then doth he wrong.
. . .

O my deare hert, young Jesu sweit, Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee to my hert, And never mair from thee depart.
But I sall praise thee evermoir With sanges sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow, And sing that richt Balulalow.

As Dew in Aprille

 (Anon. c. 1400)

I sing of a maiden that is makèles:
King of all kings to her son she ches.
He came also stille there his moder was
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the grass.
He came also stille to his moder's bour
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the flour.
He came also stille there his moder lay
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the spray.
Moder and maiden was never none but she:
Well may such a lady Goddes moder be.

This Little Babe

 (Robert Southwell, d. 1595)

This little Babe so few days old, is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake, though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmed wise the gates of hell he will surprise.
With tears he fights and wins the field, His naked breast stands for a shield;
His battering shot are babish cries, His arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need, and feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.
His camp is pitched in a stall, His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystalks his stakes; of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound, the angels' trumps alarum sound.
My soul, with Christ join thou in fight; stick to the tents that he hath pight.
Within his crib is surest ward; this little Babe will be thy guard.
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy, then flit not from this heavenly Boy.

yongë = *young*; gan weep = *began to weep*

passèd = *surpassed*

whoso = *whoever*

hert = *heart*; sweit = *sweet*; creddil = *cradle*;

spreit = *spirit*; sall = *shall*; mair = *more*;

evermoir = *evermore*; sanges = *songs*;

sweit = *sweet*; richt = *right*; gloir = *glory*;

Bulalalow = *Lullaby*.

I sing of a maiden that is matchless:

King of all kings for her son she chose.

He came as silently where his mother was

As dew in April that falls on the grass.

He came as silently to his mother's bower

As dew in April that falls on the flower.

He came as silently where his mother lay

As dew in April that falls on the spray.

Mother and maiden was never none but she:

Well may such a lady God's mother be.

rifle = *plunder*; fold = *enclosure*

for cold = *with cold*

wise = *way, manner*

muster = *troops*

trumps = *trumpets*; alarum = *alarm*

pight = *set*

ward = *protection*

flit = *move away*

In Freezing Winter Night (Robert Southwell, d. 1595)

Behold, a silly tender babe, in freezing winter night,
In homely manger trembling lies. Alas, a piteous sight!
The inns are full; no man will yield this little pilgrim bed.
But forced he is with silly beasts in crib to shroud his head.
This stable is a Prince's court, this crib his chair of State;
The beasts are parcel of his pomp, the wooden dish his plate.
The persons in that poor attire his royal liveries wear;
The Prince himself is come from heaven; this pomp is prized there.
With joy approach, O Christian wight, do homage to thy King,
And highly praise his humble pomp, wich he from Heaven doth bring.

Spring Carol (William Cornish, d. 1523)

Pleasure it is to hear iwis, the Birdes sing,
The deer in the dale, the sheep in the vale, the corn springing.
God's purveyance for sustenance, It is for man, it is for man.
Then we always to give him praise, And thank him than.

Deo Gracias (Anon. 15th Century)

Deo gracias! Deo gracias!
Adam lay ibounden, bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter thought he not to long.
Deo gracias! Deo gracias!
And all was for an appil, an appil that he tok,
As clerkes finden written in their book.
Deo gracias! Deo gracias!
Ne had the appil take ben, the appil take ben,
Ne hadde never our lady a ben hevene quene.
Blessed be the time that appil take was.
Therefore we moun singen.
Deo gracias! Deo gracias! Deo gracias! Deo gracias!

Recessional

Hodie Christus natus est: Hodie Salvator apparuit:
Hodie in terra canunt angeli: Laetantur archangeli:
Hodie exsultant justi dicentes: Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

silly = *humble*

parcel = *part, portion*

wight = *creature*

wich = *which*

iwis = *certainly*

Thanks be to God! etc

*Adam was bound in sin for four thousand
winters, which he thought not too long.*

Thanks be to God! etc

*And it was all for an apple that he took,
as clerics find written in their book.*

Thanks be to God! etc

*Had the apple not been taken, then our Lady
would not have been heavenly queen.*

Blessed be the time that the apple was taken.

Therefore we must sing:

Thanks be to God! etc, etc

Today Christ is born: the Saviour has appeared:

Today angels sing on earth: Archangels rejoice:

Today the righteous exult, saying:

Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia!