Carols of Old England

arranged for Clarinet Choir by

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Whereas we now associate carols with Christmas, traditionally they involved dancing and were a popular celebration of seasonal and ecclesiastical occasions, but the church disapproved so the melodies became separated from the dance. As an example, the famous “Deck the Hall” was originally a Welsh carol celebrating the coming of spring and had decidedly secular words (bosums, blossums, blisses and kisses). Many of the following carols date from times well before their first publication and may date from the medieval period.

**Joseph was an Old Man** (the Cherry Tree Carol) 15c. English - tells a story of Mary and Joseph’s on their journey to Bethlehem.

**Ding Dong Merrily on High** – 16c. French dance melody with words by George Woodward, an Anglican priest whose hobbies included bell-ringing.

**The Boar’s Head Carol** – 15c. English – tells the story of the presentation of the boar’s head at a Yuletide feast (“the rarest dish in all this land”) a tradition still maintained at one Oxford College and other ancient establishments.

**Past 3 O’clock** – 1687 English Melody (London Waits) the modern words again written by George Woodward, a priest, poet and amateur musician.

**Adam Lay yBounden** – 15c. English – warns of Adam’s fate, kept in bonds (four thousand winters) until the crucifixion of Jesus.

**Come all ye Worthy Gentlemen** – also known as the Somerset Carol, it was gathered by Cecil Sharp, an avid collector of folk-songs, and published in 1911 but must have much older origins.

**Gloucestershire Wassail** - “Waes Hail” is an old salute or greeting and also the name of a drinking ceremony held on Twelfth Night in Cider making regions of the south of England, singing and drinking to the health of the apple trees.

**We Wish You a Merry Christmas** – 16c West Country – celebrating the old English tradition of the wealthy giving food to Carollers on Christmas Eve.