

Coventry Carol

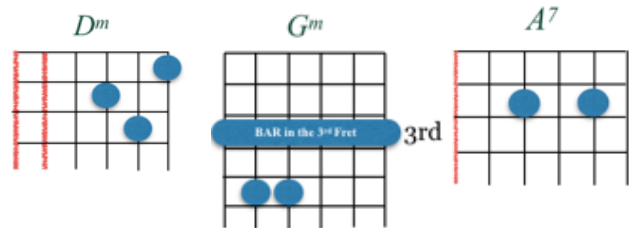
The Carol dates from the 16th century. The author of words & music is not known.

D^m A D^m C G^m A
 Lully, lullay, you little tiny child,
D^m A D^m G^m A D^m
 By by lul - ly, lullay.
F C D^m A D^m C G^m A
 You little tiny child, lul - ly, lul - lay;
D^m A D^m A⁷ A D^m
 By by lul - ly, lullay.

} Intro

D^m A D^m C G^m A
 That woe is me, poor child, for Thee!
D^m A D^m G^m A D^m
 And e - ver morn that day,
F C D^m A D^m C G^m A
 For Thy parting, neither say nor sing;
D^m A D^m A⁷ A D^m
 By by lul - ly, lullay.

D^m A D^m C G^m A
 O sisters too, how may we do,
D^m A D^m G^m A D^m
 For to pre - serve this day.
F C D^m A D^m C G^m A
 This poor youngling for whom we do sing;
D^m A D^m A⁷ A D^m
 By by lul - ly, lullay.



D^m A D^m C G^m A
 Herod the king in his ra - ging,
D^m A D^m G^m A D^m
 Charged he hath this day.
F C D^m A D^m C G^m A
 His men of might in his own sight,
D^m A D^m A⁷ A D^m
 All young children to slay.

Scripture and History

Matthew 2:13-18 When they [*the magi*] had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child [*Jesus*] and his mother [*Mary*], flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

“A voice was heard in Ramah,
sobbing and loud lamentation;
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she would not be consoled,
since they were no more.”



When the religious drama left the sanctuary, Latin gave way to common speech and the plays, presented by the various guilds, were performed at designated “stations” about the town of Coventry. Each guild was responsible for one episode (a play) from the Bible, each doing the one most suggestive of its craft. The Shipwrights would do the building of the ark; the Goldsmiths, the story of the Magi; the Shearmen and Tailors, the slaying of the Innocents by Herod; and so on.

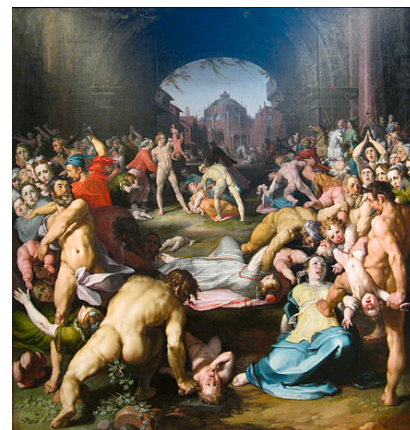
The stage for these plays was a two-story wagon called a “pageant wagon” – the lower floor serving as a curtained dressing room. Drawn by either men or horses, the pageant wagons wound their way through the old crooked streets to find a new audience eagerly awaiting them at each station, which might be a square or some well known spot such as the street in front of the Abby gate.



A Pageant Wagon

Image from <https://www.datuopinion.com/comico-de-la-legua>

The plays which re-enacted the Christmas scenes were called “Mysteries.” Carols were an integral part of these medieval dramas but, unfortunately, most of the carol music has been lost.



The Massacre of the Innocents,
by [Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem](#), 1591

The “**Coventry Carol**” is the second of three songs included in the Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors and is one of the most beautiful of all lullaby carols. It is recorded that Queen Margaret witnessed this play in 1456, although the earliest written form of the tune is dated 1591. This song is sung by the women of Bethlehem just before Herod’s soldiers come in to slaughter their children.

earlymusicmuse.com, catholicismpure.wordpress.com, and Wikipedia

Christmas as you go