

Notes from the Music Department

Doing the research into the background of the music for our Sunday services has been one of my favorite things to do. The big surprise this week was that two people who traditionally have been given credit for composing these beloved carols actually didn't.

Case #1: "What Child Is This" uses the melody of "Greensleeves," an English folk tune that had been said to have been composed by King Henry VIII as a gift to his second wife, Anne Boleyn. This is probably not true. Historians now believe it more likely that the melody made its appearance later in the Elizabethan era. The words we now sing during the Christmas season were written in 1865 by the Englishman, William Chatterton Dix, during a recuperation from a serious illness.

Case #2: "Away in a Manger" has long been attributed to Martin Luther. Although it was thought to be the work of the German religious reformer, scholars now believe that the 19th century carol is wholly American in origin. The two most common settings are by William Kirkpatrick (1895) and James Ramsey Murray (1887).

"I Wonder as I Wander" grew out of two or three lines of music that song collector and composer, John Jacob Niles, heard in 1933 as sung by an impoverished young girl at a revival meeting in Murphy, North Carolina. Niles took the song fragments, developed the original melodic material, added some additional verses and this beloved song came into being. Since then it has been sung by soloists and choral groups wherever the English language is spoken and sung.

Our energetic Advent selection for the Postlude, "Come to Set Us Free," is based on the Puerto Rican folk hymn by the same name.

Sure hope many of you will join Julie and myself for tonight's Zoom Caroling Party! We will begin at 7:30 with favorites that will include Deck the Halls, Santa Claus is Coming to Town, Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer and many more. We will be using the share feature to show the words so that you can sing along at home. Fa la la la la la la la!