

Naperville Chorus Program Notes – 12/13/2025

Ding Dong Merrily on High This is a traditional French dance tune, first printed in the sixteenth century. The lyrics were written by English citizen George Ratcliffe Woodward, first published in 1924. Woodward was interested in "change ringing" of church bells (there are Chicago-area groups which also engage in that activity), which may have suggested his subject.

Go Tell It on the Mountain John Wesley Work Jr., of Nashville, a professor of classical Latin and Greek and the son of a church choir director, became the first African-American collector of spirituals. (His activity closely parallels other early collectors of folk music, e.g., Ralph Vaughan Williams in England, and the Lomaxes in the US.) This spiritual, with obvious connections to the Nativity, was part of Work's second book, published in 1907.

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane wrote this song for Judy Garland in the 1944 movie "Meet Me in St. Louis". It was intended to be an upbeat song, although it was sung by Esther, Garland's character, in a sad scene.

Most Wonderful Time of the Year Edward Pola and George Wyle wrote this for an "Andy Williams Christmas" TV special, the second such program. It was on Andy Williams' Christmas album released in October '63 (but 'White Christmas' remained the album theme!). It became #5 of Billboard's Top 10 Holiday Songs in 2009.

Tropichristmas This medley incorporates two eclectic themes: The first, "(How'd ja like to spend Christmas on) Christmas Island", was written by Lyle Moraine and recorded by the Andrews Sisters in 1946 with Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians. Moraine likely had not visited Christmas Island -- about 9 by 12 miles, surrounded by forbidding cliffs, in the lonely Indian Ocean south of Sumatra, and most notable for wildlife: Seabirds, reptiles, and, especially, red crabs, which live in the forests and migrate to the sea by the thousands each December to spawn. The Island was named by a British captain who arrived on Christmas Day 1863. It is Australian territory (though over 900 miles away), includes a national park, and is home to about 1800 people, who depend in part on tourism — perhaps because of this song... The other song in this medley is equally strange: "Mele Kalikimaka", written in 1949 by Robert Alex Anderson, and recorded in 1950 by Bing Crosby with the Andrews Sisters, purports to describe the delights of Christmas in Hawaii. While that greeting is used in the 50th state, it is not Hawaiian, but rather an attempt to phonetically render the English phrase "Merry Christmas". But the Hawaiian tongue disallows consonants (e.g., the final "s" in Christmas) at the end of syllables. Still, if you visit Hawaii at Christmas, you will be greeted happily with that phrase-- a tribute to not only sunshine but also the sunny dispositions of the locals!

Up on the Housetop Although this song is often associated with movie cowboy Gene Autry, it is actually very old: Benjamin R. Hanby, a young Ohioan, wrote it

in 1864, seven years after "Jingle Bells", which is considered the oldest secular US Christmas song. The original lyrics have been much modernized, but Santa's reindeer landing on a roof is an image obviously derived from Clement Moore's 1822 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas", a/k/a "The Night Before Christmas".

J. R. Fancher Dec. 2025