

Latin Mandolin

by Sergio Lara

The traditional English hymn, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen", was called 'the most popular of Christmas carols' by A.H. Bullen. It first played in the United States in its best-known modern form, from an early 19th Century London broadside, followed by a more popular Victorian melody, from Sandys' collection.

When this carol first started is unknown. Carols have an interesting history. The carol's roots came not from the organized church, but from the common people who wished to express their simple ideas and honest feelings that were not expressed by the somber music of the church. By the 14th century, carol singing was firmly established throughout Europe, not to mention the dancing that accompanied it. Carols originally were associated with dancing, which explains why their tunes are livelier than that of standard church music of the day. Originally, carols were sung for all occasions, not just Christmas.

Carols became extremely popular by the 16th century, the century of the reformation. It was during this century when the first versions of many of today's carols were written. However, England's "Cultural Revolution" occurred in the war to topple King Charles I. The Puritan English Parliament of 1647 officially abolished Christmas and all other festivals. It was not until after the fall of Cromwell that Christmas became legal again. It would be another 150 years before any new carols would be published in England.

The revival of British carols and its concentration at Christmas is a Victorian phenomenon. Victoria was born in 1819 at which time carols were rarely sung. By the time she died, they were extremely popular again. In 1822, collections of the old songs were published, and the caroling tradition which had nearly died out, was revitalized. Instead of discouraging caroling as the puritans during the rise of Cromwell had done, the protestant English clergy of the Victorian era enthusiastically taught them to their parishioners.

Since the protestant churches of England and America were closely aligned during the Victorian era, as caroling became popular in England, the ex-colonies followed suit. It was during this time that the traditional English carol, God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen, became known in its modern form in America. It is still popular today, however, people seldom dance to it. Perhaps the durability of this old carol lies in the way that its first verse so plainly expresses the essence of the Christmas story.

It is one of my favorite tunes and played on the mandolin really captures the Christmas spirit.

We recorded it on the Lara & Reyes CD *Navidad* (Higher Octave Music) and gave it a Latin flavor with me on mandolin and Joe Reyes on rhythm flamenco guitar.

Happy Holidays everyone!

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Em C B7 Em

3 3

C B7 Am D

3 3

Em A C B7 Em

3

A C B7 Em

3



About Sergio Lara

Sergio Lara plays a 1980 Gibson F-5L mandolin, uses Gibson Monel Steel strings and the round side of a Fender Heavy pick. For over 20 years, Sergio has been respected and considered as one of the best artists in acoustic contemporary instrumental music. His last recording with the well-known Latin guitar duo Lara & Reyes, "World Jazz", received a Latin Grammy Award nomination for Best Instrumental Pop Album in 2001. His music is best described as New Acoustic with a Latin influence, which falls under the category of Contemporary Instrumental Music and World Music.

Please visit www.sergiolara.com and you can contact me with your questions and comments.