

MAY DAY CAROL

Traditional English Folk Song

The first day of the month of May, also known as May Day, is seen as the harbinger of summer. It is the time of year when warmer weather begins,



and flowers and trees start to blossom. It is celebrated in different parts of the world with various customs expressing joy and hope after a long winter. In England, traditional May Day celebrations include Morris dancing, crowning a May Queen, and dancing around a Maypole.

This is an arrangement of the traditional English May Day song, *The May Day Carol*. Fragments of various versions of its verses and melody can be traced back to the 16th century, and is still prominently featured in traditional May Day celebrations today. The song refers to the tradition of young men and women rising before midnight to walk in the woods, making music with horns, drums, and other simple instruments. They would break off branches of flowering trees, weave garlands, and wash their faces in the May dew, which was said to have magical properties. At sunrise, the group would begin going door to door, sing various carols and Wassail songs. The branches were planted at the front doors of all the neighboring houses, which were supposed to bring good luck for the upcoming planting and growing seasons.

The May Day traditions, including much of its music, made its way with the early settlers in this country, and are still observed today. Jean Ritchie recounts such a May Day, including the singing of this song, in a story included in her book *Singing Family of the Cumberlands*. She recorded the song on her album entitled *Carols of All Seasons*.

The version of the tune arranged here includes both a verse and a chorus.

In music and friendship,

~Tull