

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Jingle Bells

JAMES PIERPONT

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Although now associated with the Christmas season, this “merry little jingle,” written and composed by New England songwriter James Lord Pierpont (1822–93), was actually originally written for the Thanksgiving holiday. By legend, the song (1857) was inspired by the popular sleigh races held in Pierpont’s boyhood home of Medford, Massachusetts. (Savannah, Georgia, where Pierpont worked as an organist for a Unitarian church, also claims the song.) Although the lyrics and melody have since been altered, the song has since become a holiday favorite, recorded by Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, and many others.

What mood does this song evoke? Why do you think it has become associated with the Christmas holiday? How does singing this song make you feel?

Dashing thro’ the snow,
In a one-horse open sleigh,
O’er the hills we go,
Laughing all the way.

Bells on bobtail ring,
Making spirits bright,
Oh what sport to ride and sing
A sleighing song to night.

(Chorus)

Jingle bells, Jingle bells,
Jingle all the way;
Oh! what joy it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh.

Jingle bells, Jingle bells,
Jingle all the way;
Oh! what joy it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh.

A day or two ago,
I thought I’d take a ride,
And soon Miss Fannie Bright
Was seated by my side.

The horse was lean and lank;
Misfortune seemed his lot,
He got into a drifted bank,

And we, we got upsot.*

(Chorus)

A day or two ago,
The story I must tell
I went out on the snow
And on my back I fell.

A gent was riding by

* Turned over

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In a one-horse open sleigh,
He laughed as there I sprawling lie,
But quickly drove away.

(Chorus)

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Now the ground is white
Go it while you're young,
Take the girls to night
And sing this sleighing song.

Just get a bob-tailed bay
Two forty as his speed.
Hitch him to an open sleigh
And crack, you'll take the lead.

(Chorus)