



ESL Podcast 854 – Singing Christmas Carols

GLOSSARY

Christmas carol – a song traditionally sung in December in the weeks before Christmas, usually about the birth of Jesus Christ or about the holiday season in general

* “Silver Bells” and “Deck the Halls” are two of Janice’s favorite Christmas carols.

to carol – for a group of people to sing Christmas carols for entertainment, usually outdoors in a neighborhood, or in a nursing home or a hospital

* Each year, their church organizes groups of people to go caroling in the local neighborhoods.

to sing in tune – to follow the melody of a song, matching the pitch and not singing higher or lower than everyone else

* That school concert was amazing! How did you get so many five- and six-year-olds to sing in tune?

lyrics – words that are sung in a song

* If you can’t understand the lyrics when you hear a song, try to look for them online.

to outshine – to be superior; to be better or more impressive than other people or things

* The facilities in the new company office outshine all our other offices.

singer – a person who makes music by using one’s voice and lips to make a melody through words

* Lisa spent years working in New York as an opera singer.

to hide (one’s) light under a bushel – to not let other people know or see how good one is at doing something, or how smart or talented one is

* Zhanna is a very good violinist, but she has been hiding her light under a bushel so you’ve probably never heard her play.

just this once – one time only, especially when talking about doing something differently from how one normally does it

* Could you please write the report for me, just this once?



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good fit – having the characteristics of the other people or things in a group; similar to other people or things and able to spend time with them or be next to them in an organized way

* Kele grew up in a small town and tried to go to college in a large city, but he just wasn't a good fit in that environment.

traditional – with a long history of past use, especially when talking about culture or customs

* Are you going to wear traditional clothes for the ceremony?

to compose – to create a new piece of music and write it down so that other people can re-create it

* How old was Mozart when he composed his first symphony?

original – unique; new; not having been created before and/or not related to things that have been done in the past

* This painting is an original piece by a young artist in our community.

singing voice – how musical a voice is when a person is singing, referring to whether one can sing well and is pleasant to listen to

* Trent has a beautiful singing voice, so I bet he'd sound great on the radio, too.

jingle bells – a popular holiday song describing the “jingling” (ringing in a musical way) sound of “bells” (metal objects with a piece of metal inside that produces a noise when it hits the sides), especially on a “sleigh” (a vehicle pulled over the snow by horses)

* Samson associates Christmas with the sound of jingle bells, the smell of pine trees, and the taste of hot chocolate.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What would happen if Andrea forgot the lyrics?
 - a) She would forget the words to sing.
 - b) She would forget the melody of the song.
 - c) She would be singing a lone.

 2. Why doesn't Stephanie think Andrea is a good fit for the group?
 - a) Because her voice isn't very nice to listen to.
 - b) Because she isn't the same age as the other carolers.
 - c) Because she hasn't been practicing her singing.
-

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

just this once

The phrase “just this once,” in this podcast, means one time only, especially when talking about doing something differently from how one normally does it: “I’ll help you clean your room just this once, but after today, you’ll have to do it on your own.” The phrase “at once” means immediately or right away: “Come in here at once!” The phrase “at once” can also mean simultaneously or at the same time: “How can you study and watch TV at once?” Finally, the phrase “once upon a time” is used to begin fairy tales and many children’s stories: “Once upon a time, a beautiful princess lived in a castle....”

to compose

In this podcast, the verb “to compose” means to create a new piece of music and write it down so that other people can re-create it: “Jacques has composed a few pieces for the guitar, but never anything for other instruments.” The verb “to compose” also means to write, especially formally: “How often do you compose speeches for your supervisor?” The phrase “to compose (oneself)” means to become in control of one’s emotions and appearance, especially when one is very upset: “Just give me a few minutes to compose myself, and then I’ll go back into the meeting room.” Finally, the verb “to compose can mean to arrange things in some way for an end product: “Sheila is very good at composing photographs.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Animated Christmas TV Specials

Many Americans “eagerly” (with a lot of excitement and enthusiasm) look forward to “Christmastime” (the time before and during Christmas, from late November to late December) traditions. For many people, these traditions include watching the Christmas movies and TV specials. There are certain films and shows that are shown on TV every year around Christmas, and some people watch them every year.

One of the more “popular” (liked by many people) “animated” (with drawings, not with actors) Christmas TV specials is *Rudolph the Red-Nosed “Reindeer”* (a large animal like a deer, but with heavy antlers or horns on its head). The TV special shows how Rudolph was chosen to “guide” (lead) Santa’s “sleigh” (the vehicle Santa travels in) because his red nose served as a light through the “fog” (heavy clouds low to the ground).

Charlie Brown Christmas is an animated special showing a popular cartoon character and his friends as they look for the perfect Christmas tree and end up with a very small, “scrawny” (skinny, without many branches) tree. *Frosty the Snowman* is an animated TV special about a “snowman” (a figure made from snow) named Frosty who “comes to life” (becomes alive) and needs to find a way to the “North Pole” (the cold place where Santa lives) before he “melts” (warms up and turns into a liquid).

Another popular animated Christmas TV special is *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, based on a children’s book by Dr. Seuss. It is about the “Grinch” (a green, monster-like character) who hates Christmas and tries to stop Christmas celebrations in a small town.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 854: Singing Christmas Carols.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 854. I'm your host Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to ESLPod.com and become a member of ESL Podcast. It's the best gift you can give yourself.

This episode is about singing Christmas carols or Christmas songs. Let's get started.

[start of dialog]

Andrea: What are you doing?

Stephanie: I'm coming up with a list of Christmas carols to sing when we go caroling.

Andrea: Can I come?

Stephanie: Uh, I don't think...

Andrea: What? You don't think I can sing in tune?

Stephanie: No, it's not that...

Andrea: You think I'm going to forget the lyrics?

Stephanie: No, it's not that either...

Andrea: I know what it is. You think I'm too good. I'll outshine the other singers. Don't worry. I don't mind hiding my light under a bushel, just this once.

Stephanie: Well, it's not that either. I just don't think you're a good fit for our group.



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Andrea: Not a good fit? I'm very knowledgeable about music and know all of the traditional carols. I've even composed some original ones that you might consider adding to your list.

Stephanie: I know you're very knowledgeable about music, but in our group, it's all about the singing voice.

Andrea: What's wrong with my singing voice? Listen to this [sung loudly and poorly]: "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way..."

[end of dialog]

Andrea begins by saying, "What are you doing?" Stephanie says, "I'm coming up with" – I'm thinking about, I'm inventing – "a list of Christmas carols to sing when we go caroling." "Christmas" is the Christian holiday, now celebrated by people who aren't Christian, on December 25th. And a "carol" (carol) is a traditional song that is sung during the Christmas season, during the weeks before and a few weeks after Christmas. "Caroling" (caroling) is a tradition where people get together in small groups and they go around and they sing Christmas carols in public, usually for other people, usually outside – that is, not inside of a building. I think I went Christmas caroling a couple of times when I was a teenager, not a lot. You don't see people doing this very much anymore.

Andrea says, "Can I come?" He wants to go with Stephanie. "Can I come?" "Can I come with you?" Stephanie says, "Uh, I don't think..." Andrea says, "What? You don't think I can sing in tune?" "To sing in tune" (tune) means to be able to sing a song with the right notes, not being higher or lower than you should be. Many people say I cannot sing in tune. That's probably true. Stephanie says, "No, it's not that..." meaning it's not that she thinks he can't sing in tune. Andrea says, "You think I'm going to forget the lyrics?" Andrea is trying to understand why Stephanie is hesitant, that is, why she doesn't seem to be very excited about him going with them on the Christmas caroling event. He says, "You think I'm going to forget the lyrics?" The "lyrics" (lyrics) are the words that are sung in the song. Stephanie says, "No, it's not that either..."

Andrea says, "I know what it is. You think I'm too good." You think I'm going to be so much better than the other singers. Andrea says, "I'll outshine the other singers." "To outshine" (outshine) – one word – means to be better than other people, to be, we might say, "superior" to other people. You're so good that everyone sees how much better you are than the rest of the group. Singers, of course, are the people who sing.



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Andrea says, “Don’t worry. I don’t mind hiding my light under a bushel, just this once.” “To hide the light under a bushel” (bushel) means not to let other people know or see how good you are at doing something, how smart you are or how talented you are. The expression comes from the Bible, from the New Testament, from one of the stories that Jesus tells in the Bible. The word “bushel” is what we would call a “unit of measurement” equal to about 36 liters. It’s a measure of volume, of capacity. But in the expression, it really refers to a large container, like a large basket or bucket that would be big enough to hold a bushel of something. If you turn the container upside down and put a light underneath it, of course, you can’t see the light. And that’s where the expression comes from.

Andrea is saying that because he is such a good singer, he won’t try to outshine the other singers. He won’t sing as good as he could sing. He says he’ll do this “just this once.” The expression “Just this once,” means only one time. You’re going to do something differently than the way you would normally do it.

Stephanie says, “Well, it’s not that either. I just don’t think you’re a good fit for our group.” “To be a good fit” (fit) means to be similar to other people or other things in a group, especially if you’re going to spend a lot of time with them. Sometimes companies will tell people interviewing for a job at that company that they’re not a “good fit for this position.” That means they don’t think you have the exact qualifications or characteristics that would work well in a certain job. Here, it means that Andrea isn’t like the rest of the group that’s going to be singing and so, it wouldn’t be a good fit.

Andrea says, “Not a good fit? I’m very knowledgeable about music and know all of the traditional carols.” Andrea says he knows a lot about music and he knows all of the “traditional” carols. “Traditional,” here, refers to things that have a long history, things that have been going on for a long time. Usually, we use this adjective in talking about culture or customs. “Traditional carols” would be carols that have been sung for many years, many generations even.

Andrea says that he knows all of the traditional carols. “I’ve even composed some original ones that you might consider adding to your list.” “To compose” (compose) means to create a new piece of music and, usually, write it down so that other people can play it themselves. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms – these were all great composers of earlier centuries. Anyone who writes the music for a song can be called a “composer,” with an -r at the end. “To compose,” however, is the verb.

Andrea says he’s composed some original carols. “Original,” here means new, that have not been created before. Stephanie says, “I know you’re very



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knowledgeable about music, but in our group, it's all about the singing voice.”
“The singing voice” is how well someone sings. Your “voice” (voice) is the sound that you make, that comes out of your mouth. Usually, you are saying something that people can understand, although my wife thinks I make a lot of noise that no one understands, at least, her.

Andrea is, according to Stephanie, someone who doesn't have a very good singing voice. So, you see, Stephanie was lying earlier in the dialog when she said that it wasn't about the fact that Andrea couldn't sing in tune and so forth. Really, she doesn't think Andrea is a very good singer. And now, we finally hear her say that directly. Andrea says, “What's wrong with my singing voice? Listen to this...” And then he tries to sing a traditional carol called “Jingle bells.”

“Jingle bells” (jingle bells) – two words – is a popular holiday song, a popular Christmas song describing the ringing or jingling of bells. The song goes “Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way...” But Andrea's not a very good singer so it sounds like: “Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way...”

Wait a minute, that's how I sound!

Now let's listen to the dialog, this time at a normal speed.

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Andrea: Not a good fit? I'm very knowledgeable about music and know all of the traditional carols. I've even composed some original ones that you might consider adding to your list.

Stephanie: I know you're very knowledgeable about music, but in our group, it's all about the singing voice.

Andrea: What's wrong with my singing voice? Listen to this [sung loudly and poorly]: "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way..."

[end of dialog]

Our scriptwriter has a wonderful singing voice and a very creative mind. I'm speaking, of course, about our very own Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again, right here on ESL Podcast.

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