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Hello, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, a podcast for music loving families! I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and you're listening to episode 139. Thanks so much for tuning in, especially during the busy holiday season! Today, we're going to revisit a topic we explored a few years ago in episode 35. If you were listening back then, you might remember our episode where we took a closer look at three beloved Christmas carols—"Hark the Herald Angels Sing", "Joy to the World", and "Go Tell It on the Mountain". Those songs each have fascinating stories, and if you missed that episode, I'll link it in the show notes. This year, I thought it would be fun to look at a few more classic carols. So today, we'll be exploring "Angels We Have Heard on High", "The First Noel", and "Silent Night". Let's jump right in!

First up, let's take a closer look at "Angels We Have Heard on High". This carol is known for its joyful melody and, of course, the famous "Glo-o-o-o-o-ria" refrain! "Angels We Have Heard on High" actually began as a French carol, called "Les Anges dans nos campagnes", which translates to "The Angels in Our Countryside". The lyrics tell the story of the shepherds in the fields, hearing the angels' song on the night of Jesus's birth. This idea of the angels spreading joy and news to the world was a popular theme for Christmas songs across Europe.

The carol was first published in the 18th century, but its true origins are a bit of a mystery! Some believe it was a folk tune sung by shepherds in the mountains of France. By the mid-1800s, the carol was translated into English and became widely sung in English-speaking churches. The melody, with its powerful "Gloria" chorus, also includes a technique called melisma. This is when one syllable is sung across multiple notes, which adds an extra lift and joyfulness to that "Gloria" refrain. Let's listen to how it's done...

Over the years, “Angels We Have Heard on High” has been performed by choirs around the world and recorded by artists from nearly every musical genre, making it one of the most recognizable carols today. It’s a carol full of movement and celebration, which is why it’s a favorite for holiday concerts and services.

Our second carol today is “The First Noel”, another song with English origins. “Noel” is actually an old French word for Christmas, so “The First Noel” simply means “The First Christmas”. The carol’s lyrics tell the story of the first Christmas night, starting with the shepherds who saw the star in the sky and eventually leading us to the visit of the Wise Men.

“The First Noel” is a traditional English carol from Cornwall, a region in the southwest of England. Miracle Plays were one of the earliest forms of theater that came about during the 13th or 14th century. The plays portrayed famous stories from the Bible. “The First Noel” is believed to have originated from one of these Miracle Plays about Christ’s birth. While we don’t know exactly who wrote it, it’s believed to have been passed down as a folk song. Its memorable melody and repetitive structure make it easy for people to sing along, and that’s part of what helped it become a beloved carol across generations.

An interesting feature of “The First Noel” is its use of repetition in the melody, which gives it a meditative, almost lullaby-like quality. Many performances take advantage of this by slowing down the tempo, allowing singers to add emotion and focus to each verse. Some of the most moving renditions have been performed by church choirs, folk singers, and even orchestras, and it’s become a traditional favorite in both formal and casual holiday settings.

Now, let’s take a look at “Silent Night”, one of the most beloved Christmas carols worldwide. “Silent Night” has a beautiful, peaceful melody that seems to bring a quiet calm whenever it’s sung. The story behind “Silent Night” begins in Austria in 1818. The lyrics were written

by a young Austrian priest named Joseph Mohr. Mohr asked his friend Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolteacher and organist, to write a melody for the lyrics, which he had written two years earlier.

Here's where the story takes an interesting turn: on Christmas Eve in 1818, at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria, the church organ was damaged from river flooding. Mohr and Gruber needed a carol that could be sung with just a guitar accompaniment, and so "Silent Night" was born! The simple melody and gentle lyrics made it perfect for guitar, and that very night, Mohr and Gruber performed the carol together for the first time. The congregation loved it, and soon, the song began to spread from village to village, across Austria, and eventually around the world.

"Silent Night" has been translated into hundreds of languages, and in 2011, it was even declared an "intangible cultural heritage" by UNESCO. One of the most touching performances of "Silent Night" took place during World War I, on Christmas Eve of 1914. Soldiers on both sides of the trenches held a temporary ceasefire and sang carols, including "Silent Night", together. Even though they were enemies, the carol united them in a moment of peace. Today, "Silent Night" is one of the most commonly performed carols on Christmas Eve, bringing a message of peace, hope, and love to people around the world.

If you head over to this episode's show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/139, I've put together a curated playlist of a variety performances on YouTube for these 3 Christmas Carols we've talked about in today's episode. Again you can find that playlist linked at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/139. Well, that brings us to the end of our journey into the history of these three beautiful carols. I hope you've enjoyed learning a bit more about "Angels We Have Heard on High", "The First Noel", and "Silent Night". Each carol has its own unique story and has brought people together in the spirit of the season for centuries. If you'd like to listen to more stories behind your favorite pieces of music, be sure to subscribe to Busy Kids Love Music so you

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never miss an episode.

As always, thank you for spending this time with me today. I hope you have a wonderful holiday season, filled with music, joy, and perhaps a little caroling of your own! I'll see you next time on Busy Kids Love Music when our next brand new episode airs in two weeks. Bye for now!