Tale from the Garden!

O Tannenbaum (O Christmas Tree) — A Song that has Very Little to do with Christmas!!!!!

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
How lovely are your branches!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
How lovely are your branches!
Not only green in summer's heat,
But also winter's snow and sleet.
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
How lovely are your branches!

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
Of all the trees most lovely;
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
Of all the trees most lovely.
Each year you bring to us delight
With brightly shining Christmas light!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
Of all the trees most lovely.

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
We learn from all your beauty;
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
We learn from all your beauty.
Your bright green leaves with festive cheer,
Give hope and strength throughout the year.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree,
We learn from all your beauty.

O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
How faithfully you blossom!
Through summer's heat and winter's chill
Your leaves are green and blooming still.
O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
How faithfully you blossom!

O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
With what delight I see you!
When winter days are dark and drear
You bring us hope for all the year.
O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
With what delight I see you!

O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
You bear a joyful message:
That faith and hope shall ever bloom
To bring us light in winter's gloom.
O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
You bear a joyful message

I love this Christmas 'Carol' & the picture it evokes. Our repertoire of Christmas Carols transcends cultures and religions & brings together a common concept of peace and light during the dark seasons of the year.

"O Tannenbaum" (German: [oː ˈtanənbaʊm]; "O fir tree", English: O Christmas Tree) is a German Christmas song. Based on a traditional folk song which was unrelated to Christmas, it became associated with the traditional Christmas tree by the middle of the 19th century and sung as a Christmas Carol.

The modern lyrics were written in 1824 by the Leipzig organist, teacher and composer Ernst Anschütz. A 'Tannenbaum' is simply a fir tree & the lyrics do not actually refer to Christmas or describe a decorated Christmas tree. Instead, they refer to the firs evergreen quality as a symbol of constancy and faithfulness.

Anschütz based his text on a 16th-century Silesian folk song by Melchior Franck, "Ach Tannenbaum". In 1819 August Zarnack wrote a tragic love song inspired by this folk song, taking the evergreen, "faithful" fir tree as contrasting with a faithless lover. The folk song first became associated with Christmas with Anschütz, who added two verses of his own to the first, traditional verse. The custom of the Christmas tree developed in the course of the 19th century, and the song came to be seen as a Christmas carol. Anschütz's version still had treu (true, faithful) as the adjective describing the firs leaves (needles), harking back to the contrast to the faithless maiden of the folk song. This was changed to grün (green) at some point in the 20th century, after the song had come to be associated with Christmas.

The lyrics imply that the 'tannenbaum' evergreen quality is a symbol of constancy, endurance and faithfulness through the cold German winters. The Fir tree is seen as a symbol of spring and hope.

After all, the evergreen qualities of the fir tree are in contrast to the bare looks of most deciduous trees during the winter season.

Evergreen trees (and other evergreen plants) have traditionally been used to celebrate winter festivals (pagan and Christian) for thousands of years. Pagans used branches of evergreen trees to decorate their homes during the winter solstice, as it made them think of the spring to come. The Romans used Fir Trees to decorate their temples at the festival of Saturnalia. However, they were quite different to what we think of as Christmas Trees now.

Nobody is really sure when Fir trees were first used as Christmas trees. It probably began about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe.

Christmas Trees might well have started out as 'Paradise Trees' (branches or wooden frames decorated with apples). These were used in medieval German Mystery or Miracle Plays that were acted out in front of Churches during Advent and on Christmas Eve. In early church calendars of saints, 24th December was Adam and Eve's Day. The Paradise Tree represented the Garden of Eden. It was often paraded around the town before the play started, as a way of advertising the play. The plays told Bible stories to people who could not read. The Paradise Tree had more decorations on it (sometimes communion wafers, cherries and later pastry decorations of stars, bells, angels, etc. were added) and it even got a new nickname the 'Christbaum' or 'Christ Tree'.

Some early Christmas Trees, across many parts of northern Europe, were cherry or hawthorn plants (or a branch of the plant) that were put into pots and brought inside so they would hopefully flower at Christmas time. If you couldn't afford a real plant, people made pyramids of woods and they were decorated to look like a tree with paper, apples and candles. It's possible that the wooden pyramid trees were meant to be like Paradise Trees. Sometimes they were carried around from house to house, rather than being displayed in a home.

Some trees (or at least small tops of them or branches of fir trees) were hung from the ceiling, mainly in some parts of Germany, some Slavic countries and parts of Poland. This might have been to save space or they just looked nice hanging from the rafters!

The first documented use of a tree at Christmas and New Year celebrations is argued between the cities of Tallinn in Estonia and Riga in Latvia! Both claim that they had the first trees; Tallinn in 1441 and Riga in 1510. Both trees were put up by the 'Brotherhood of Blackheads' which was an association of local unmarried merchants, ship owners, and foreigners in Livonia (what is now Estonia and Latvia).

Little is known about either tree apart from that they were put in the town square, were danced around by the 'Brotherhood of Blackheads' and were then set on fire. This is like the custom of the Yule Log. The word used for the 'tree' could also mean a mast or pole, tree might have been like a 'Paradise Tree' or a tree-shaped wooden candelabra rather than a 'real' tree.

A picture from Germany in 1521 shows a tree being paraded through the streets with a man riding a horse behind it. The man is dressed as a bishop, possibly representing St. Nicholas.

The first person to bring a Christmas Tree into a house, in the way we know it today, may have been the 16th century German preacher Martin Luther. A story is told that, one night before Christmas, he was walking through the forest and looked up to see the stars shining through the tree branches. It was so beautiful, that he went home and told his children that it reminded him of Jesus, who left the stars of heaven to come to earth at Christmas. So, he brought a tree into his house and decorated it with candles to represent the stars.

Another story says that St. Boniface of Crediton (a village in Devon, UK) left England in the 8th century & travelled to Germany to preach to the pagan German tribes and convert them to Christianity. He is said to have come across a group of pagans about to sacrifice a young boy while worshipping an oak tree in honour of Thor. In anger, and to stop the sacrifice, St. Boniface cut down the oak tree and, to his amazement, a young fir tree sprang up from the roots of the oak tree. St. Boniface took this as a sign of the Christian faith and his followers decorated the tree with candles so that St. Boniface could preach to the pagans at night. Hanging trees upside down has also been connected with St. Boniface. One story/theory says that he used the 'triangle' shape of an upside-down fir tree to help explain the trinity in the Christian faith (God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit). Being upside down it looked a bit like a cross and so also helped to explain the crucifixion.

There is another legend, from Germany, about how the Christmas Tree came into being, it goes:

Once on a cold Christmas Eve night, a forester and his family were in their cottage gathered round the fire to keep warm. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. When the forester opened the door, he found a poor little boy standing on the doorstep, lost and alone. The forester welcomed him into his

house and the family fed and washed him and put him to bed in the youngest son's own bed (he had to share with his brother that night!). The next morning, Christmas Morning, the family were woken up by a choir of angels, and the poor little boy had turned into Jesus, the Christ Child. The Christ Child went into the front garden of the cottage and broke a branch off a Fir tree and gave it to the family as a present to say thank you for looking after him. So ever since then, people have remembered that night by bringing a Christmas Tree into their homes!

In Germany, the first Christmas Trees were decorated with edible things, such as gingerbread and gold covered apples. In 1605 an unknown German wrote: "At Christmas they set up fir trees in the parlours of Strasbourg and hang thereon roses cut out of many-colored paper, apples, wafers, gold foil, sweets, etc.". At first, a figure of the Baby Jesus was put on the top of the tree. Over time it changed into a star like the Wise Men saw or an angel/fairy that told the shepherds about Jesus. The 'angel' might also have started as a version of the 'Christkind' which translates as 'The Christ Child' but is normally shown as a little angel figure with blond hair!

The first Christmas Tree in the UK was probably set-up by Queen Charlotte, the German wife of King George III. Queen Charlotte grew up in Mecklenburg-Strelitz and in the 1790s there are records of her having a yew branch in Kew Palace or Windsor Castle. She helped to decorate it herself and it became a popular event for the royal court. In 1800 she had a full yew tree set-up at the Queen's Lodge in Windsor for a children's party for rich and noble families. Dr John Watkins, who went to the party described the tree like this: "...from the branches of which hung bunches of sweetmeats, almonds and raisins in papers, fruits and toys, most tastefully arranged; the whole illuminated by small wax candles.". And "...after the company had walked round and admired the tree, each child obtained a portion of the sweets it bore, together with a toy, and then all returned home quite delighted.". Queen Charlotte died in 1818 and by then, having a Christmas Tree was a tradition among much of the upper classes – though there's no mention of a Christmas Tree in 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens, which was published in 1843!

They became very popular throughout the country from the mid-1840s, when reports of 'the Royal tree' were printed in newspapers. In 1848, a drawing of "The Queen's Christmas tree at Windsor Castle" was published in the Illustrated London News. It showed Queen Victoria, her German Husband Prince Albert and their young children around a tree which was set-up on a table. In Victorian times, the tree would have been decorated with candles to represent stars. In many parts of Europe, candles are still used to decorate Christmas trees. Lead and glass decorations started being made in the 1860s and 1870s. Some of the first glass decorations were apples - and that's probably where round, red, baubles on Christmas Trees comes from! Frank Woolworth started selling glass ornaments in his stores in the USA in 1880!

There's nothing quite like a real Christmas tree. From the iconic shape to the nostalgic scent of pine needles, it's a heart-warming sight. Over the centuries, the tree has become loaded with traditions & symbols but whichever story you enjoy the most, it will always fill the soul with joy.

And there's nothing nicer than walking through the streets at night, safely of course, seeing the Christmas trees in people's windows & living rooms or by people's front doors, twinkling with sparkling lights & reminding us of the coming of the Christ-child. Season's Greetings!