

DECK THE HALLS

Traditional 16th c. Welsh Carol: NOS GALAN
Lyrics, trans. Thomas Oliphant, 1862

"Deck the Halls" or *"Deck the Hall"* (which is the 1877 title) is a traditional Christmas, yuletide, and New Years' carol. The melody is Welsh dating back to the sixteenth century, and belongs to a winter carol: NOS GALAN, while the English lyrics date to 1862.

The English lyrics first appeared (still called *"Nos Galan"*) in volume 2 of *"Welsh Melodies"*, a set of four volumes authored by John Thomas with Welsh words by John Jones (Talhaiarn) and English words by the Scottish musician Thomas Oliphant, although the repeated *"fa la la"* goes back to the original Welsh tune: NOS GALAN and may originate from medieval ballads. As can be seen from the translation of *"Nos Galan"* (New Year's Eve), *"Deck the Hall(s)"* is not a translation but new words by Oliphant to an old song.

The tune: NOS GALAN is that of an old Welsh air, first found in a musical manuscript by Welsh harpist John Parry dating back to the 1700s. In the eighteenth century the tune spread widely, with Mozart using it in a piano and violin concerto and, later, Haydn in the song *"New Year's Night"*. Originally, carols were dances and not songs. NOS GALAN would have been used as a setting for any verses of appropriate metre. The church actively opposed these folk dances. Consequently, tunes originally used to accompany carols became separated from the original dances, but were still referred to as 'carols'. The connection with dancing is made explicit in the English lyrics by the phrase *"follow me in merry measure"* as 16th and 17th c. dances danced at the Inns of Court in London were called the *"Old Measures"*.

This song has been in several TV shows including, *"The Big Bang Theory"* and *"The Office"*. There was also a 2006 movie called *"Deck The Halls"* starring Danny DeVito and Matthew Broderick as neighbors who feud over their Christmas displays.

~ Tull