

DING DONG! MERRILY ON HIGH

Traditional Irish carol
arranged by Douglas Mears

Instrumentation

SATB Choir
Handbells (Two Octaves – Optional)
Sleigh Bells (Optional)
Piano Four Hands

DE THOINOT ARBEAV. 92
Tabulature du branle de l'Official.

Air de ce branle. Mouvements d'iceluy.

ried gaulche largy.
petit fault.
ried droit approché.
petit fault.
Pied gaulche largy.
petit fault.
Pieds ioinctz.
petit fault.
Pied largy droit.
petit fault.
ped gaulche approché.
petit fault.
ped largy droit.
petit fault.
Pieds ioinctz.
petit fault.
Pied gaulche largy.
petit fault.
rieds ioinctz.
petit fault.
ped largy gaulche.
petit fault.
Pieds ioinctz.
petit fault.
ped largy gaulche.
petit fault.

Ces quatre pas font vn double a gaulche.

Ces quatre pas font vn double a droit.

Pendant ces pas icy, les danseurs vont toujours du costé gaulche, sans diuer tir a droit.

Notes

Ding Dong! Merrily on High is one of the most joyful and spirited of all Christmas songs. Like many traditional carols still sung today, it originated centuries ago. The earliest manuscript of this melody dates back to 1588, making it over 400 years old. Interestingly, the piece initially had nothing to do with Christmas—it was a secular dance tune known as “Branle de l’Official.” The earliest surviving manuscript shows this melody written vertically in a collection titled *Orchesographie* by Thoinot Arbeau, the pen name of Jehan Tabourot (1519-1595). His pen name choice was fascinating because it is an anagram of his real name—the same letters placed in a different order.

Orchesographie is a valuable historical document that includes many of the French Renaissance’s popular melodies, and it instructs how to dance to the music. The branle was danced by a chain of dancers, usually in couples, with linked arms or holding hands. Though the music for “Branle de L’Official” is included in Arbeau’s collection, there is no indication that he wrote it.

This popular tune circulated throughout Europe for over 300 years before it was given an English text by the Anglican priest George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848-1934). “Ding Dong! Merrily on High” was first published in 1924 in *The Cambridge Carol Book*. Woodward’s lifelong interest in church tower bell ringing and archaic poetry no doubt influenced the writing of this beloved Christmas carol.