

Not a Happy New Year

By Pete Clark

New Year's Eve is party time, when you can let your hair down, bend your elbow, enjoy the crowd and the music and generally not have to worry about going into work the next day. January First has not always been considered to be the beginning of the New Year. Before Julius Caesar instituted the Julian Calendar and made January the first month of the year, the new year was celebrated on the Vernal Equinox, the Fall Equinox or the Winter Solstice, depending on what part of the world was recognizing the event.

In the Sixth Century AD the Council of Tours outlawed the celebration of the New Year on January First saying the practice was rooted in paganism and therefore unchristian. In response to this edict, the new year was intermittently celebrated in the various countries and Kingdoms of Medieval Europe on December 25, Christ's birthday or March 1, Feast of the Annunciation or March 25, Easter. In the 16th Century AD the adoption of the Gregorian Calendar restored January 1 to the status of the first day of a new year in catholic countries while protestant countries were very slow to accept the new calendar. For instance Great Britain and her colonies did not accept the Gregorian Calendar, continuing to observe New Year's Day in March until 1752.

Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians made Auld Lang Syne a holiday icon when they played the song a few minutes into the New Year of 1929 with the first radio broadcast of the farewell to a year at its conclusion. Lombardo's rendition of Auld Lang Syne can still be heard on television on New Year's Eve.

In the western world and its outposts around the globe the first few minutes of a new year are generally met with at least one stanza of Auld Lang Syne.

Auld Lang Syne began life in the oral traditions of the Celts, Picts and Caledonians of Scotland and was first written out by Robert Burns, or so he claimed, in 1788 and sent to James Johnson to be included in The Scotts Musical Museum and was published in 1796 after Burns' death. Auld Lang Syne was closely similar to Old Lang Syne published by James Watson in 1711. Note that the s in syne is pronounced as an s in Scotland and not as a z. The literal translation of 'auld lang syne' is 'old long ago' indicating older times, something unreachable and alien.

Auld Lang Syne focuses only on the past, reminding one of lost love, lost friendships, lost joys and lost good times as if trying to leave those who sing with no memories of past happiness. The song seems possibly to be a warning of future pitfalls and dangers, trying to prepare everyone for a rough road ahead, to be prepared for any detours which must be taken. In the end the lyrics warn us that we must make our own sunshine.