

# Taking A Spirited New Look At A Fanciful Old Tune

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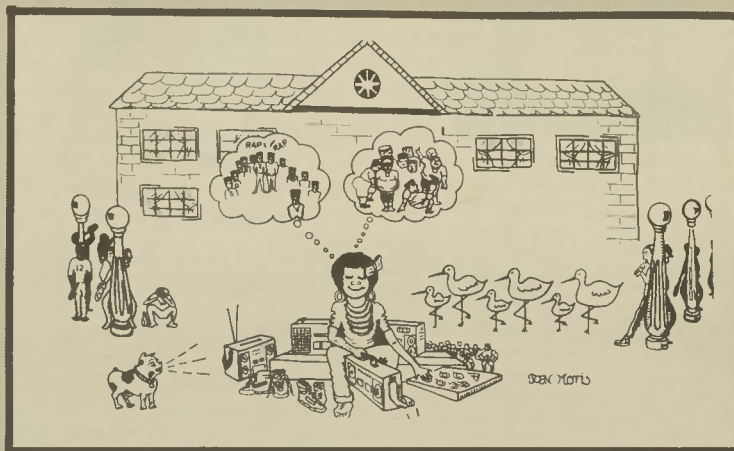
The music of the Christmas season is as much a part of the celebration as are turkey dinners, family reunions, and religious services. Each generation carefully rehearses the words of songs both religious and secular and then passes the tunes faithfully on to the next generation to carry on the tradition. And as with other time-honored traditions, sometimes the original meaning or a tune's words become lost or are no longer familiar or relevant to the members of the newer generation.

Let's take, for example, a favorite that is hummed, sung, or serves as background music to a number of television commercials - "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Although the author is unknown, the traditional melody and words are believed to date back to the Middle Ages (that's 10th - 16th century A.D. for those who slept history). It was a time when knights in suits of armor fought for the hands (lily-white) of fair ladies and lords lorded it over huge castles on more land than R.J. Reynolds'

original estate.

In the song, some young and definitely rich Lochinvar (that's lover, to those of you who slept English Lit.) gives a succession of somewhat exotic gifts to his true

- eleven pipers piping;
- ten lords a-leaping;
- nine ladies dancing;
- eight maids a-milking;
- seven swans a-swimming;
- six geese a-laying;



love on each of the twelve days of Christmas. Each day he gives her a new gift and adds a repetition of the ones he gave on all the days before:

On the twelfth day, the luck lady receives:

- twelve drummers drumming;

- five gold rings;
- four calling birds;
- three French hens;
- two turtle doves; and
- a partridge in a pear tree.

All of this she added to the other days' receipts for a grand total of 371 drummers, pipers, lords, ladies, maids, swans, geese, gold rings, calling birds, French hens, turtle doves, and partridges. No small cost at today's prices for

musicians, cows, fowl, and gold - hard to find or afford if you make minimum wage and live in a low-income neighborhood, as was recently pointed out to me.

Awhile back, some Black and Latino friends of mine in a New Jersey project development were kicking around ideas on how the tune (which they had just heard on TV) could "be made relevant" to their ghetto and barrio experiences and shared their version with me. So with apologies to those in the minority community who are too high-toned to poke fun at themselves, here is what my street friends developed as their own New Age gifts for the "Twelve Days of Christmas":

- Twelve rappers rappin';
- Eleven winos leanin';
- Ten Lords in bomber jackets;
- Nine M.C. Hammers break dancin';
- Eight Sun-Man superheroes flying;
- Seven huge pierced earrings;
- Six pink plastic flamingoes;
- Five gold neck chains;
- Four ghetto blasters;
- Three barking pitbulls;
- Two Michael Jordan Nikes;
- And a pigeon on the project rooftop.

Theirs may not be as elegant as the ones in the original tune, but they're certainly cheaper. And after all, it's the thought that counts!

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