

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

**ADVENTSSITTEN / ADVENT CUSTOMS
ADVENTSLIEDER / ADVENT SONGS**

song: das Lied, die Lieder
to sing: singen, singt, sang, gesungen



**Songs and Poems of the
(pre-) Christmas Season**

There are researchers who contend that Christmas songs are older than the celebration of Christmas itself. Be that as it may, singing and music-making have always been an integral part of the Christmas season, first in the churches, later in individual homes. Even today in Germany a distinction is made between Advent songs and Christmas songs. Advent songs are performed beginning with the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day; Christmas songs are reserved for the immediate pre-Christmas period and shortly thereafter. During such traditional “home concerts”, the respective candles of the Advent wreath are lit, “Lebkuchen” (gingerbread) and cookies are laid out and between songs one or more Christmas stories are read, in segments. These Advent celebrations are so popular with some children that they beg to hold them daily, though in most families they are reserved for Sundays. In kindergartens and grade schools the children spend untold hours practising (new) songs, which are then performed for proud and teary-eyed parents during a special Christmas party.

The same trend applies to the traditional poetry reading. It was once customary for children to recite a poem by heart – for instance, “’Twas the Night before Christmas. . .” or any of several German equivalents – on the eve of St. Nicholas’ visit (in Germany, on the 6th of December), at school Christmas parties and, of course, prior to ripping open the packages under the Christmas tree. That was always something very exciting for the kids, who just couldn’t wait to play their parts. And most parents also suffered butterflies, in anticipation of their progeny’s feats or flubs with poems learned agonizingly by heart. Nowadays the tendency is to push the play button on a cassette deck or simply to dispense with poems altogether. There are increasing numbers of parents, however, who looking back nostalgically to their own pre-Christmas performances, find the motivation to rehearse the good old (or the slick new) Christmas poem with their kids.

In recent years, pre-Christmas music has come to be heard earlier and earlier, prior to the first Sunday of Advent, first and foremost over department store loudspeakers. This kind of involuntary musical inundation robs many people of the desire to actually sing themselves around the familial Advent wreath. Even on Christmas Eve, formerly the true highpoint of home music-making, many families now give preference to the radio or to the artistry of LPs.

