

**POST CHRISTMAS SEASON / NACHWEIHNACHTZEIT**

**New Year's Eve: Silvesterabend (der 31. Dezember)**

**New Years Eve custom: Silvesterabendsitte**

**noise: der Krach, die Kräche**

**New Years Eve: Silvesterabend**

- **star singing: Sternsingen in Oberammergau**

***Church Bells  
and a Toast to the New Year***

The fireworks begin a few minutes after midnight. At exactly midnight church bells everywhere begin to toll. In a number of small towns and even in some larger ones, trombonists play from up on the church towers. This is a custom which could only originate in small towns, where the inhabitants live so close to one another that one can actually hear what is being played. Nowadays, the trombonists can hardly make themselves heard above the fireworks and all the other noise. Still, these concerts from the churchtower have remained popular, perhaps because they give the illusion that the town is still an orderly, harmonious little world in itself.

New Year's Eve, or Silvester, as it is called in German, is also an occasion on which to make others happy. Thus in the past young men would go from house to house and sing a little song. After the singing, shots were fired, and the leader of the group wrote with chalk the new year on the front door of the house. The occupants awarded the singers with money or in kind, so that they could go to the village inn upon completion of their tour. If people didn't give anything, they were verbally abused and called names, like "old miser", or worse, and as a kind of punishment, a donkey was painted on their door.

In many places there is today still the old custom of greeting the New Year with orchestra and choir on the market square of village or town.

New Year's Eve is also a time — perhaps even more so than Christmas — for giving pleasure to other people. Young people in the Sauerland, Bergisches Land, and the Westerwald used to go from house to house, singing a multi-part song. When the song was over, guns were fired and the troupe's leader chalked the new date on house doors. People in the houses expressed their recognition in the form of money or agricultural produce so that the young men could stay together afterwards in the pub. Anyone who did not do that was mocked as being stingy, a greedy donkey. A donkey was also drawn on his door instead of the date. In the villages and towns of Altmark, New Year's processions have scarcely changed up to the present day. Places with a reputation to maintain have brass music performed from the church tower on New Year's Eve. This is usually a religious melody but the tune at Lüdenscheid in Westphalia was "The old year is past". Old drawings show that the custom of singing and music-making used to exist throughout Germany. In places where this custom declined, specific individuals were engaged to take over this function. In many places, the night watchman had the task on New Year's Eve of blowing a beautiful song as well as sounding the hours on his horn — for which he was suitably rewarded. This custom has experienced a great revival wherever brass-players are to be found since people find the practice beautiful and meaningful. Distribution of New Year's presents is still a custom throughout Germany too. The main beneficiaries are people who serve the public year-in year-out such as postmen, dustmen, servants, long-service employees, security guards, etc.

The custom of welcoming the New Year with celebrations and general gaiety dates from time immemorial, and in many places there is also an ancient custom whereby a choir, and sometimes a band as well, go round serenading from house to house.