

WE BRING YOU A CROSS-SECTION OF HOLIDAY CUSTOMS, TRENDS, TREATS AND TOASTS WHICH ARE INTEGRAL TO BANGALORE



CAROL CHEER:
Singing tunes of
the season

REV DONALD
GRANT TRACES THE
NOTES OF A POPULAR
CHRISTMAS
TRADITION
— CAROLLING

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Prajwal Hegde | TNN

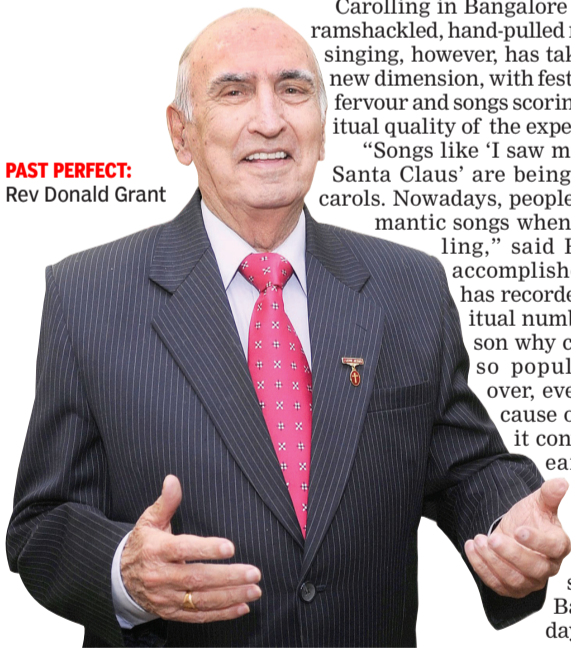
It was 60 years ago, but Reverend Donald Grant remembers that evening like it was six hours ago. Crystal clear, like the morning dew.

It was the 80-year-old's first carol singing experience. On a stinging cold December night, huddled behind a hurricane lantern, he and four friends — Pat D'Cruz, Gladys Charlesworth, Max Austin and Frank Higgins — set out on a memorable four-hour marathon. Wrapped in mufflers and mittens and hitting notes on carols such as 'Away in a manger', the quintet went from house to house, lighting up the old Cantonment town, a Bangalore far removed from today's IT capital.

Carolling in Bangalore is as old as its ramshackled, hand-pulled rickshaws. The singing, however, has taken on a whole new dimension, with festivity replacing fervour and songs scoring over the spiritual quality of the experience.

"Songs like 'I saw mummy kissing Santa Claus' are being passed off as carols. Nowadays, people often sing romantic songs when they go carolling," said Rev Grant, an accomplished singer who has recorded several spiritual numbers. "The reason why carol singing is so popular the world over, even today, is because of the message it conveys, peace on earth and goodwill for mankind. It's not about merry making. As I see it here in Bangalore these days, it's more of

PAST PERFECT:
Rev Donald Grant



VOICES OF CELEBRATION

A PICK OF THE CITY'S BEST CHOIRS

Glorious — This youth choir focuses on contemporary gospel music.

The Bangalore Conservatory — Focuses on Western classical music, boasts the first handbell ensemble in India.

Madrigals Etc — Is perhaps the only choir that specializes in Renaissance music in India.

The Cecelian Choir — The choir's main objective was to use good music to raise funds for social welfare programmes.

East Parade Malayalam Church Choir — Focuses on Western classical songs and harmony singing, operates through the year.

St. Andrew's Church Choir — The choir's history goes back to the late 19th and early 20th century, when the church pipe organ was installed.

Christ University Choir — Is invariably over 100 strong. Music has now become part of the University's curriculum.

Mount Carmel College Choir — Specialists in close harmony singing.

Bethany School Choir — Specialize in movements, making the singing very animated.

St Joseph's College of Commerce Choir — Specialists in classical pieces.



SING A SONG: Young voices in the city hit a high note

a commercial experience with a cultural slant."

While the essence of the carolling experience may have altered somewhat, the routine is largely the same. Groups of people, young and old, visit houses in the neighbourhood, singing two or three of their favourite songs. They're offered cakes and beverages, sometimes even wine and cash. Back in the '50s, carol singing, which kicked-off in churches, saw youngsters singing for the old and sick. They went to hospitals, homes for the aged, and even prisons at a time when entertainment was more personal than what was playing on TV. Today carolling is an occasion, where clothes are as much a part of the show as are the carols themselves. It's spiritual with a dash of spice. Coffee with cinnamon.

In the mid and late '40s, South Parade Road (now the city's central business district or MG Road), saw soldiers from the King's Own Regiment, Officers Training School, MGB and Centre and Scottish and Italian battalions line the streets, singing carols. Almost on cue, people dining in the nearby restaurants, Funnell, Three Aces and Pigalle, joined in the celebrations. Those days, the festive experience wasn't about bright lights, blasting sound systems or beautiful clothes; it was a joyous celebration, love and music filling the air.

Rev Grant, who sang at St Andrew's Church in his youth, said carolling 50 or 60 years ago, was as eventful as it was enjoyable. Sitting at a street-side cafe on MG Road, his alert mind travelled back to the December of 1956. "In a way," he said, taking off his hat and placing it on the table before picking up a steaming mug of coffee, "this winter reminds me of those days. It has been a cold December this year, just as it was in '56. The five of us had gone carolling to Whitefield. We took a train from the Bangalore East station, it was a half-hour ride. When we arrived, we found that Whitefield was like a cemetery without lights."

The highest pay packet the fivesome earned that evening was four annas, not good enough to get even one of them into a cinema hall. It was past midnight when they were done and the last of the trains into the Cantonment area was long gone, forcing the young group to walk all the way to Ulsoor in the dead of night.

Christmas has always been inclusive. If, as 26-year-old media professional Roshni Raj says, her Muslim and Hindu friends also join in the festivities, it was no different in the '50s and '60s. Some 50 years ago, a boys' club called Sunday Break on Charles Campbell Road stirred the Christmas cheer, when young men of all religions turned out in large numbers, in sync and singing.

"Everybody embraced Christmas and the traditions that went with it, carol singing in particular. It didn't matter who you were or where you came from, each of us added to the collective presence," Rev Grant said, pointing out that while the inclusive quality hadn't diminished, it is also about the individual today.

Tall glasses of cheer

Vikram Achanta

It isn't over till the fat man drinks. Coca Cola invented Santa Claus, or if not Claus himself, the image of how we all perceive Santa to look.

Prior to 1931, he was pictured as everything from a 'tall gaunt man to a spooky looking elf'. In 1930, however the Coca Cola Company released a Christmas ad where artist Fred Mizen, pictured a Santa for the ages in a department store, and that's what caught on.

This Christmas we're hoping you are drinking something stronger than a carbonated beverage, and if you're not, we have some recommendations for you.

Fresh off a train in Cologne in a chilly winter, I was primed for the Christmas fair, which had sprung up right outside the Cologne cathedral, which is located fortuitously close to the train station. One of the miracles of the World War II, was how the Cologne Cathedral survived the extensive bombing the city received, and I'm glad it did.

Let me get back to the Glühwein (German mulled wine) though, which was for sale, at numerous stalls across the carnival, and a glass or three of warm, spiced wine, was just what my body needed. And for your drinking pleasure, here's a recipe for Mulled Wine.

This warm, sweet and spiced treat is typically had in the cold winter months of Europe. You needn't wait for it to snow; when the temperatures drop a bit in our tropical winter and that festive mood hits, bring out the mulled wine for some holiday cheer.

RECIPE FOR MULLED WINE

Ingredients:

Red wine 1 bottle
Oranges 2, sliced
Cinnamon, four 1-inch sticks
Cloves 4-5
Star anise 3-4
Sugar 2 tbsp
Mace 1 bud
Nutmeg ¼ tsp, powdered
Brandy 60 ml

Add all the ingredients (except the brandy) to a sturdy glass bowl and cover it with cling film. Place the bowl over a pan of water on a medium flame and heat for about twenty minutes. Remove the bowl from the flame, add the brandy and portion it out into individual ceramic cups. Spoon a slice of orange from the bowl into each cup, and serve warm.



GUILTY PLEASURES OF CHILDHOOD:

Ever raided the fridge for that can of condensed milk, and hoping you didn't get your lip cut on the jagged edge of the can? Well, we've got something special for you, and this time it involves rum too. Pick up some Christmas Cake from Koshy's and enjoy slice after slice with this drink.

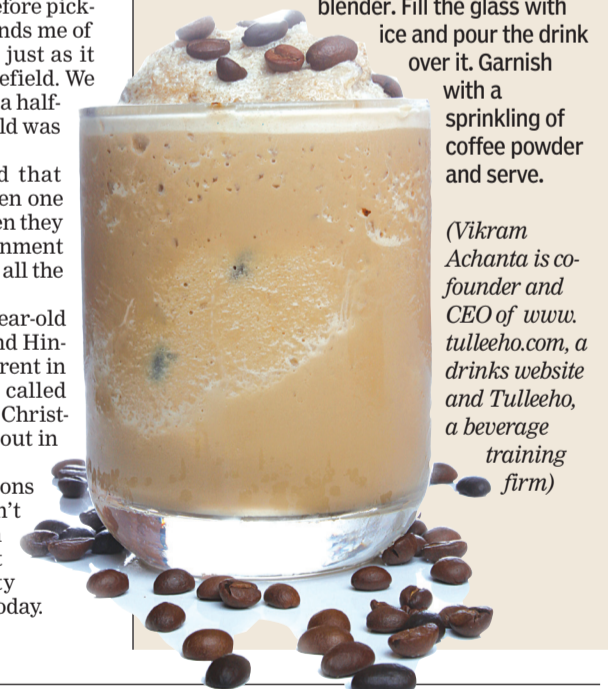
RECIPE FOR DREAM CREAM

This one's nice, easy, and the perfect way to get your after-dinner spirit, coffee and dessert all in one glass.

Ingredients:

Dark rum 30 ml
Kahlúa 30 ml
Condensed milk 30 ml
Instant coffee powder ¼ tsp and a sprinkling to garnish
Vanilla essence 1-2 drops
Ice to fill glass

Blend all the ingredients (except ice) in a blender. Fill the glass with ice and pour the drink over it. Garnish with a sprinkling of coffee powder and serve.



(Vikram Achanta is co-founder and CEO of www.tulleeh.com, a drinks website and Tulleeh, a beverage training firm)



THE MAGIC OF PLUM AND RUM

Michelle Gafoor

I started baking Christmas cakes from home some seven-eight years ago. I got this recipe from my mother, Leela D'Souza, and it has been in our family for generations.

The preparations start around September, when I buy the ingredients, and mix the fruits with rum. This gives the mixture ample time to soak and settle well until we start baking in December. The longer you soak the fruits the better for a great tasting cake.

The true test of a finished cake is that it should be moist and delicious.

Baking the cakes is quite a task, but unlike some other home bakers, we don't outsource this process. The baking starts on December 1 each year. Our 15-year-old ovens aren't huge. So we start early, waking up at 5 am to mix the cake. We bake around 14 kg of cake every day for the first few days, later, depending on orders, it goes up to 30 kg on some days. The total quantity we bake each year is around 300 kg. We bake the cake only during this festive season.

CHRISTMAS PLUM CAKE



Ingredients:
Sugar - 1 kg
Dalda - ½ kg
Maida - 1 kg
Mixed fruits (also known as mixed peel) minced into small pieces - 1 kg
Petha (sugared ash gourd) - 1 kg
Raisins - ¼ kg
Walnuts or Cashew nuts cut into small pieces - ½ kg
Marmalade - ½ kg
Spice powder - 1 teaspoon
Butter - 1 kg
Eggs - 22
Suji (Bombay Rava) - 100 gms
Sultanas (large dried plums) - ¼ kg
Rum - ¼ bottle
Baking Powder - 2 tablespoons
Almond and Vanilla essence to taste

Cut the mixed peel, petha, sultanas, raisins and walnuts into small pieces.

Add ¼ bottle rum and keep the mix in a sealed container for a few days. However, the longer you keep, the better it tastes. **Tip:** Before adding to the cake, remember to dust this peel with half the maida so that the fruit is not sticky and the pieces are separated from each other. Then keep aside.

Steps to prepare burnt sugar: Take 150 gms of sugar in a pan and heat over a medium flame. Allow the sugar to melt and turn brown. Stir and allow the sugar to cook until it starts to smoke and turns black. Add ¼ cup hot water to form thick treacle. Set aside to cool.

Beat the sugar and eggs till the mixture turns white. Add butter and dalda and stir till the mixture turns fluffy. Add the sifted maida, baking powder, suoji, marmalade, spice powder,



Michelle Gafoor

burnt sugar and essence to the mixture and mix all the ingredients well by hand. Then add the floured fruit, a little at a time and fold in by hand. Put the cake in tins lined with brown paper smeared with butter.

Bake in a pre-heated oven at 350 degree for about one hour until it starts to leave the side. **Tip:** To test if it's done, insert a toothpick into the cake. If it comes out clean, the cake's been baked perfectly. Cool and store in air-tight tins.