

New Year's Music: Where Memories and Hopes Meet at Midnight

Welcome to This Is America with VOA Learning English. Steve Ember brings you music for the New Year.

In the United States and other countries, this old Scottish song, "Auld Lang Syne" is played when a new year begins. The song is about remembering old friends.

New Year's is a holiday for memories and for hopes. The past and the future come together at midnight. Not surprisingly, emotions are as much a part of New Year's Eve as noisemakers and fireworks. After all, a traditional way to welcome the New Year is to kiss the person you love.

"Old Lang Syne" lends its name to a modern song about a man and a woman who once were lovers. One day, a week before New Year's, they meet again by chance. The singer is Dan Fogelberg and the song is called "Same Old Lang Syne."

On December 16, 2007, fans of Dan Fogelberg lost an old friend. The American singer and songwriter died of prostate cancer at the age of 56. He was known for the kind of soft rock popular in the 1970s and 80s. "Same Old Lang Syne" was one of the hits from his 1981 album "The Innocent Age."

The idea of meeting an old lover by chance is also at the heart of a Paul Simon song. Here is the title song from Paul Simon's 1975 album "Still Crazy After All These Years."

Chance meetings are one of life's little surprises. They can happen anywhere -- in a market, on the street, even in a taxicab. This song by Harry Chapin is called "Taxi."

Harry Chapin was a popular folk singer and songwriter. In 1981, at the age of 38, he died in a car crash on his way to a performance.

Music and emotions go hand in hand. Songs can make us feel the heartbreak of a lost love, or the excitement of finding a new love. Songs can also capture the pain of a wish that a person knows will never come true. Here is James Blunt with "You're Beautiful."

The 1989 movie "When Harry Met Sally" was about a relationship. Billy Crystal plays Harry and Meg Ryan is Sally. They meet and become friends, though not at first. Later, they fall in love, though not for very long. Then, on New Year's Eve, Harry comes to his senses and finds Sally at a party.

HARRY: "I've been doing a lot of thinking, and the thing is, I love you."

SALLY: "What?"

HARRY: "I love you."

SALLY: "How do you expect me to respond to this?"

HARRY: "How about you love me, too?"

SALLY: "How about I'm leaving?"

HARRY: "Doesn't what I said mean anything to you?"

SALLY: "I'm sorry, Harry. I know it's New Year's Eve, I know you're feeling lonely, but you just can't show up here, tell me you love me, and expect that to make everything all right. It doesn't work this way."

HARRY: "Well, how does it work?"

SALLY: "I don't know, but not this way."

HARRY: "How about this way? I love that you get cold when it's 71 degrees out. I love that it takes you an hour and a half to order a sandwich. I love that you get a little crinkle above your nose when you're looking at me like I'm nuts. I love that after I spend a day with you I can still smell your perfume on my clothes. And I love that you are the last person I want to talk to before I go to sleep at night.

"And it's not because I'm lonely, and it's not because it's New Year's Eve. I came here tonight because when you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible."

SALLY: "You see? That is just like you, Harry! You say things like that, and you make it impossible for me to hate you. And I hate you, Harry. I really hate you."

What are they doing now? Well, you can probably guess.

From New Year's Day, we turn to "A New Day." That was the name of Celine Dion's music and dance show at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada. It closed on December 15, 2007, after almost five years. It earned a reported 400 million dollars in ticket sales.

The show's run ended two months before the start of a worldwide tour for a new album by the Canadian singer. But some fans came to the show again and again, so closing night was like an emotional goodbye to an old friend.

We leave you with Celine Dion and a song that some of you will probably sing along with. From the 1997 movie "Titanic," here is "My Heart Will Go On."

Avi Arditti wrote today's program, and Steve Ember was your reader. We hope you will join us again next week for This Is America, on the radio or online at learningenglish.voanews.com.



Wishing you a happy New Year from all of us at VOA Learning English.