

# The Religious Carol in Transylvania – Function and Symbol

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*In the context of Romanian folkloric tradition, the carol represents one of the oldest cultural elements. The first part of this article defines the genre and functions of the Romanian carol, and explains that its basic function is the conveyance of wishes, referring to all aspects of the social and personal life of the recipient. As far as the nature of the carol is concerned, the second part of the article reveals some characteristics of the sense and symbol of the religious carol, concluding that carols are part of those traditional texts and melodies that can be called Eucharistic chants. Their preservation and practice in different areas of the country highlight their worth, as they essentially represent liturgical echoes arising from the ethnogenesis of the Romanian nation.*

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## 1. The carol<sup>1</sup>: musical genre and function in Transylvania

An important chapter in Romanian traditional culture is represented by the folklore surrounding the main holidays of the year, wherein the intertwining of the beliefs and practices of the Romanian people with religious elements pertaining to Christian and pre-Christian times is oftentimes combined in rituals that look like true performances. One of these is the custom of going carolling.

The complexity of this rite is obvious, as it is a ceremonial act of communication and interrelation. The folkloric creations that underlie carolling impress by the different blends of varying proportions of poetical, musical, choreographic and dramatic elements.

These all combine into a unified collection of signs, clues and symbols and, just as in any other communication process, they acquire an abundance

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<sup>1</sup> The Carol is according to *The Oxford dictionary*: “A religious folk song or popular hymn, particularly one associated with Christmas”, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/carol>, viewed on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016. In Romanian tradition this meaning extends to “a popular augural song practiced around Christmas time”. It is also true that the corpus of Romanian carols (summing around 5000 carols in many variations) contains just a small number of religious carols (around 300 songs), which actually deal with the Themes of the Nativity of Christ. For more details see: Ileana Szenik, Ioan Bocșa (eds.), *Colinda în Transilvania – Catalog Tipologic muzical*, Vol. I, Cluj-Napoca 2011, p. 15-24.