

Sumer Is Icumen In

(Lately Spring Has Come Around Again)

Medieval Anon



Su - mer is i - cu - men in. Lhu - de sing cuc - cu.
Late - ly spring has come a round a gain. Loud ly sings cuc koo.



Gro - weth sed and blo - weth med and springth the wood a - new.
Seeds spring up and mead ows bloom and tree buds shoot a new.



Sing cuc - cu. Ew - e ble - teth af - ter lomb. Lowth
Sing cuc koo. Ewe is bleat ing for her lamb. Cow



af - ter cal - ve cu. Bul - loc ster - teth buc - ke ver - teth.
bel - lows for her calf. Bul lock jumps. The old goat farts and



Mu - rie sing cuc - cu. Cuc - cu cuc - cu.
sweet - ly sings cuc - koo. Cuc - koo, cuc - koo, O



Wel sing - es thu cuc - cu, ne swik thu nav - er nu.
you sing well O cuc - koo, and nev - er do you cease.



Sing cuc - cu nu — sing cuc - cu Sing cuc - cu sing cuc - cu nu —
Sing cuc - koo now sing cuc - koo. Sing cuc - koo sing cuc - koo now.

Sumer is Icumen In

Original (Middle English, Wessex Dialect)

Sumer is icumen in. Lhude sing cuccu.

Groweth sed and bloweth med and springth the woode nu. Sing cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb, lhouth after calve cu.

Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth, murie sing cuccu.

Cuccu, cuccu, wel singes thu cuccu, ne swik thu naver nu.

Free Translation

Lately spring has come around again, loudly sings cuckoo.

Seeds spring up and meadows bloom and trees shoot buds anew. Sing cuckoo!

Ewe is bleating for her lamb, cow bellows for her calf.

Bullock jumps, the old goat farts and sweetly sings cuckoo.

Cuckoo, cuckoo, O sing ye well O cuckoo and never do you cease.

This song, found in a manuscript from the library of Reading Abbey, was written in about 1260 AD. It may be the oldest popular English language song. It is one of the first major scale melodies. It is one of the first examples of counterpoint – when sung as a round, exhilarating waves of harmonious chords resound. It is a joyful celebration of springtime.

Did one of the monks write it, or did he bring it with him to the monastery? I wonder whether the “*farting old goat*” is a cheeky reference to a stern abbot or a disciplinarian novice master? I can imagine what fun the monks who invented singing in counterpoint must have had. They would have to have been very careful about when and where they sang their new creations. This is still a marvellous song to sing as a round.

Glossary of Middle English Terms

awe, n. ewe, female sheep

bleteth, v. to bleat (uttered by sheep)

bucke, n. billy goat

bulloc, n. bullock

calve, n. calf

cu, n. cow

cuccu, n. cuckoo

icumen, v. to come, present participle, coming

lhude, adv. loudly

lomb, n. lamb

lhouth, v. low, bellow (uttered by cattle)

med, n. fields, meadows, grassland

murie, adv. merrily

naver, adv. never

ne, prep. nor

sed, n. seed, grain

singes, v. to sing

sterteth, v. to jump or leap

sumer, n. spring or springtime. Not our summer, but a wider portion of the year spanning from late winter to early summer.

swik, v. to cease or stop

thu, pron. thou, or you

verteth, v. to fart

wel, adv. well

Sources:

Melody, original words and modern translation.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer_is_icumen_in

Facsimile of original manuscript

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/harl978/sumerms.htm>

Free translation, Michael Gallagher