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DEAR UNCLE MAX

Send questions to Dear Uncle Max,
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10115.

*Where can I find English translations of
the titles of French Noël's? "Chantons je
vous prie" means nothing to a congrega-
tion, and "French Noël" is a generic
cop-out.*

P.P., Ariz.

If only Catharine Winkworth had moved on in 1863 from her *Chorale Book for England* to a *Noel Book for Northern England* with texts in English and French, or if the *Oxford Book of Carols* had been balanced by an *Oxford Book of Noels*, the problem would be easy. As it is, I haven't found one large collection that is really satisfactory, though it may exist. There is an excellent article in *The Diapason* (Dec. 1968, pp. 24-27), "The Noël's of Louis-Claude Daquin" by Conrad Grimes, which begins, "The French Noël seems to have been largely ignored by English-speaking people, especially those in North America. The hymnals of most denominations include only three or four well-known ones along with an abundant supply of English carols and German chorales for the season." The article has very good, singable translations of most of the Noël's Daquin used, as well as a very interesting discussion of those that are descriptive and seem to follow the text verse by verse, such as the ten verses of "À la venue de Noël" ("As Christmas-tide comes once again"). Still not all stanzas are given. The delightful translations, with one exception, are the author's own.

Titles for Noël's used by *Les Noël'stes*—Nicolas Gigault, Nicolas Antoine Lebègue, André Raison, Pierre and Jean-François Dandrieu, Louis-Claude Daquin, Michel Corrette, Jean-Jacques Beauvarlet-Charpentier, and Claude Balbastre—may be found in Janet Satre Tobiska's doctoral dissertation, *The Noël's of the Eighteenth-Century French Organ School*, available from Bell and Howell Information and Learning, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346; phone 800-521-0600. You may purchase a printed copy, either unbound, soft cover, or hard-bound. The first lines of each Noël are given in translation, either by the author or with the help of the persons mentioned in her acknowledgments. It should be noted that many of the titles are not going to be as you learned French in high school but in various dialects. If this were not so, the easiest solution would be to corner someone who speaks French and coerce

a translation. About 70 different Noël titles are included—I use a round number because more than one text is often associated with a single tune, for example, "Quand Jésus naquit à Noël," "Quand le Sauveur Jésus Christ fut né de Marie," "Quand Dieu naquit à Noël," as well as "Bon Joseph écoutez-moi." That goes the other way, too. "Chantons je vous prie" ("Let us sing, I beg of you"), the one you mention in your question, has three tunes, all three used by Michel Corrette and Pierre Dandrieu.

For more contemporary carols and Noël's, the best source may be the *Oxford Book of Carols*. My 1983 edition lists 20 French carols, only one of which overlaps with Dr. Tobiska's work. Here we have a sufficient number of the texts to understand the sense of the Noël's and, of course, a way to check the translations. Actually, the Oxford book and Tobiska's give you about 90 firm titles in French and English. A pretty comprehensive selection.

In even-numbered years, at least two new versions of an endlessly reprinted, reshuffled carol book called (usually) something like "Carols from Many Lands" or "Sing and Celebrate Christmas with Our Friends from Lapland to New Guinea" come off the press. They are worth investigating; there could be something French in them.

As to whether listing the titles in French or English is a cop-out is not that easy to decide. I think most of the French titles carry little or no association with anything we sing or know in English, at least not in the sense that if you say "Stille nacht, heilige nacht!" or "Adeste fideles," English words and associations come immediately to mind. A few, like the tune used by Balbastre called, "Au jô deu de pubelle," translated as "A toast to dance, god of maidens," suggests a bit more than the idea of Christmas Eve might include; while "Ah, ma voisine, es tu fâchée," rendered "Oh! my neighbor, are you angry?" might call up a scene of escalating violence where heads get bopped, animals start to bray, low, or howl, parents get distraught, and normal babies would cry in the confusion, and above it all, on a higher plane, you would have Hark—The Angelic Resonating Kwire singing a few choruses of "Peace, peace! Goodwill, goodwill!" Somehow not what St. Francis had in mind for a crèche scene. There is a mystique about French, and it just may be that occasionally the less one understands the better.

I recently saw the movie The Ghost and Mr. Chicken with Don Knotts. In it, there is an organ that can be played from a tuning keyboard in another room where the pipes are, making everyone think a ghost is playing it. I am not familiar with tuning keyboards. Is this

something Hollywood made up or do these really exist? And if so, how do they work?

V.H., Colo.

This is a fun movie for kids, parents, and grandparents. The video I watched is from Universal Pictures (1966). It would be hard to determine whether Don Knotts is perfectly cast or the part was perfectly written just for him. The film deals with a murder-suicide committed 20 years earlier in the Simmons house. A man and wife were found dead. In the tower where the organ console is located, the man at the keyboard—which he was accustomed to play at midnight—slumped over, still bleeding. Twenty years later, the bloodstains on the keys are still visible, though we are informed that they had been thoroughly scrubbed with Bon Ami!

Don Knotts, who is a typesetter on a local paper, does a byline on the 20th anniversary. Then he is challenged to spend a night in the house—complete with rickety self-starting Victrola, a bleeding portrait of the wife, sliding bookcase panels, secret stairs, and, finally, a *secret organ keyboard* for the (apparently) self-playing organ. Sound frightening? No one gets frightened as well, acting-wise, as Don Knotts!

The organ, as seen, is a two-manual with stop tabs, some down, with sagging keys at the bottom of the keyboards. At the right moments it plays a composition full of diminished fifths and diminished seventh chords (as you might expect), plus some rather slithery harmony. In the final scene, a wedding (Don Knotts gets his girl, the romantic element), the “tuning keyboard under the pipes” is shown, seemingly moved for the wedding.

Such a thing could exist. I can’t imagine its useful function. Seems so pointless to build a special keyboard to tune from. Of course, if you knew you were to be murdered and planned to come back to haunt people, it would be prudent to have everything ready. However, I am sure these are all props of some sort. On both keyboards the music played didn’t match what was happening as the keys went up and down. Easy to see, especially on the trill where the player’s hand rests quietly on the keys. Also, the racking of the pipes, when shown, was helter-skelter and sufficiently blurred by many cobwebs to matter little in creating its effect.

The nearest thing to the tuning keyboard suggested by the movie that I know would be the small organ called a “voicing jack,” which is used for voicing in organ factories. The racks can be changed in size for the various sets of pipes that are temporarily placed in them for ready access, as the voicer inserts and removes them while making adjustments—such as size of toe hole, cutup of mouth, nicking (if any), har-



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monic development—to various parts of the pipes to get the desired matching speech and timbre.

I don’t know how the association between the organ, large Victorian houses,

hauntings, Halloween, murder, mayhem, misdeeds, and bloody scenes got started, but at least here it’s wonderful fun!

MAX B. MILLER, FAGO



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DON KNOTTS
"THE GHOST AND MR. CHICKEN"
Reunited • A Universal Picture

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the exhibition of the picture of your choice.
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66/28

(photo courtesy of Rollin Smith)