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## 'The Star of Bethlehem' and 'O my Papa'

'The Star of Bethlehem' and 'O my Papa', what do they have in common?

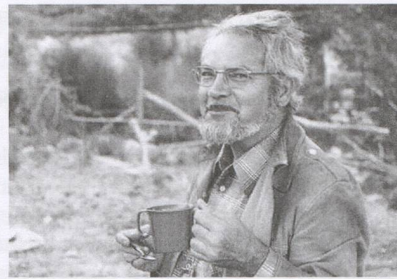
If you are from my vintage, you might have guessed it; both were composed by one of the most famous Swiss musicians, Paul Burkhard.

**Biography notes:** Paul was born in Zurich in 1911, into an artistic family: mother was of a Silk-Embroiderer, father a stained glass painter, his older sister Lisa a singer. He had a strong bond with Lisa during his whole life.

Paul's musical talent was recognised from his early years – he composed his first tune at age 6. He did his schooling in Zurich, where he completed his studies at the Conservatory with degrees in composition and piano.

Burkhard's work took him from Zurich to Bern, then to Berlin, to New York, back to Zurich. In 1959 he got a house built in the township of Zell near Zurich, where he then lived until his death in 1977. He is well remembered there, his house is used for musical performances, they have choirs for children and adults in Zell in his memory, and even a 3k walking track with plaques describing his life. For more information visit: [www.zell.ch](http://www.zell.ch) Some of his works will sound familiar to you: He composed many comedies and musicals, like the 'Niederdorf Opera', and did the music to many shows, eg Berthold's Brecht 'Mother Courage and her Children', to the film 'Emil, me mues halt rede mitenand' (Emil, you just have to talk to each other), and even had a go at a new Swiss National Anthem.

**O mein Papa** was a song in his Swiss German musical 'der Schwarze Hecht' (the black pike), composed in 1937 and first performed in Zurich in 1939. A circus artist praises her Papa who



was a wonderful clown, a great man who radiated so much fun. The song became much more famous when the musical was re-written in High German in 1950 as 'Das Feuerwerk'. The Swiss Singer Lys Assia created a worldwide hit, translated into some 40 languages.

**Zeller Wiehnacht** (Christmas from Zell), in Swiss German pronounced 'Zäll'

The people of Zell were very happy to see Paul Burkhard move into their community, and realised that he had a particular gift for interacting with children. They asked him to write a work for children. He happily obliged, and wrote text and music for the 'Zeller Wiehnacht'. It is a nativity play with a difference. One of the points Burkhard wanted to make was that Christ had been born for all humans – black and white, rich and poor, young and all. He wanted to communicate the essentials of Christmas, not the fancy bits. There are no costumes, no makeup, not even a stage or a backdrop. 120 children took part in the first performance. The players' roles are interchangeable. If the group is smaller, he suggests: 6 tall boys, 9 medium sized boys, 7 little boys, 10 taller and 10 smaller girls, plus a group of another 30 children. There are parts for teachers, for priests, governments' ministers, and even for King Herod – and of course the usual angels, shepherds, oriental kings, ox and donkey.

It was a moving experience for the whole community to witness the first performance at Christmas 1960. People of all denominations had been invited to the beautiful old gothic church of Zell.

The play has been performed in many places since. In 2011, the Zurich Schauspielhaus (Playhouse) had put it on, in memory of Paul Burkhard's 100th birthday.

*I have never had the pleasure of seeing the whole play, but love the tunes. You may want to dig up your recorder and play 'The Stern of Bethlehem' (below). We look forward to singing a few of the Zeller songs at our Christmas carol singing on Saturday afternoon, 12 December, see Auckland Club News for more details.*

Nelly Steinemann

Sources: [www.zell.ch](http://www.zell.ch), [www.omeinpapa.ch](http://www.omeinpapa.ch)

Introduction to: 'Die Zeller Weihnacht, ein Krippenspiel mit Musik'.



### Im Wartsaal vor em Himmel

Im Wartsaal vor em Himmel stohd  
e Puurebüebli still,  
ond hebt de Chopf, werd bläch und rot,  
wässt nüd, was söll ond will.

Do goth di goldig Himmelstör  
met beidne Flögel uuf;  
de Petrus schlaped müed daher,  
ond s Büebli lood den Schnuuf.

"Hopp ine jetz! Was luegsch mi a?"  
"Waascht, s isch mer nüd rächt drom.  
Wenn i bi deer nüd zaure chaa,  
Den chehr i z lääd grad om!"

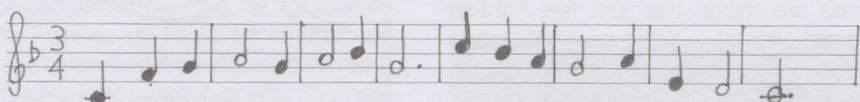
Do lacht de Petrus: "Gad of dii  
hend's passt scho ewig lang!  
S schönscht vo der Himmelmelodii  
isch jo din Jodelgsang!"

By Julius Ammann  
(Appenzöller Spröch ond Liedli)

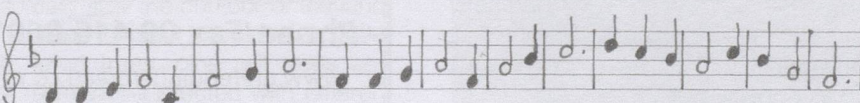
Hint: "Zaure" or "Zäuerli" refers to what the people from the canton of Appenzell call the "Naturjodel", a form of yodelling that is very original and natural and comes from the depth of the body.

### Das isch de Stern vo Bethlehem

Paul Burkhard, Zäller Wiehnacht



Das isch de Stern vo Beth-le-hem, ma-ched eu uuf und fol-ged dem.



Es isch der al-ler schön-schti Stern, chö-med ihr Lüüt vo nah und fern, chö-med ihr Lüüt vo nah und fern.

Zum Heiland fñehrt de Stern eus hii,  
Drum folged alli, gross und chlii!  
Er liit im Chrippli arm und bloss,  
Aber er wird en König gross,  
Aber er wird en König gross.

Lobed und danked eusem Stern,  
Folged ihm noh und folged gärn!  
Eimal dänn winkt er eus und trait  
Über-n-eus i d'Ewigkeit,  
Über-n-eus i d'Ewigkeit