

## **“Auld Lang Syne” in modern English with melismas as in Robert Burns original version**

### **Melismas in the lyrics of Robert “Rabbie” Burns to “Auld Lang Syne”**

The lyrics that Robert “Rabbie” Burns wrote and set to a traditional Scottish folk song in 1788 to create the song we know as “Auld Lang Syne” use melismas. Melisma is a vocal technique where a single syllable of text is sung over multiple notes, creating a smooth, flowing vocal run or flourish (“vocal runs”). It is often used in pop, R&B, gospel, and classical music to add emotion, showcase vocal skill, and create dramatic effect, for example, by artists such as Whitney Houston, Beyoncé, Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, and Aretha Franklin. Syllabic singing, in contrast, uses a separate note for each syllable.

### **Melismas in Robert Burns’ lyrics for “Auld Lang Syne”**

#### Last line of the first verse

The phrase “Should old acquaintance be forgot and **auld lang** syne?” uses two melismas: a melisma for the word “**auld**” and a melisma for the word “**lang**.” These single syllable words are sung over two musical notes.

#### Last line of the chorus

This also occurs in the phrase “We’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet, for **auld lang** syne”: “**auld**” and “**lang**” are sung melodically.

### **“Auld Lang Syne” sung with syllabic singing**

“Auld Lang Syne” is often sung in a syllabic manner. Syllabic renditions of “Auld Lang Syne,” where each note corresponds to a single syllable, are commonly used to fit the lyrics into a strict 4/4 or 2/4 time signature, avoiding the more melismatic (multiple notes per syllable) flourishes found in Burns’ original version, in some traditional folk performances, and in songs by artists such as Whitney Houston and Beyoncé. Avoiding melismas in the singing of “Auld Lang Syne” forces a more strictly syllabic rhythm (one note per syllable) rather than the original, more flowing phrasing. This structure emphasizes a rhythmic, march-like cadence that is popular for group sing-alongs.

## Adding “days of” to convert Burns’ melismas to syllabic singing

To sing “Auld Lang Syne” in a syllabic manner, the words “days of” are often added to the last line of the first verse and the chorus\*

### Last line of the first verse

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And auld lang syne?”

### Adding “days of” for syllabic singing

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And **days of** auld lang syne?”

This technique avoids the melismas on “auld” and “syne” but is redundant and silly.

“Auld lang syne” means “days gone by,” so adding “days of” results in “**days of days** gone by.”

### Last line of the chorus

The same technique is used for the last line of the chorus.

“We’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet,  
For auld lang syne.”

### Adding “days of” for syllabic singing

“We’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet,  
For **days of** auld lang syne.”

\* Usually, only the first verse and the chorus of “Auld Lang Syne” are sung.

## **New translation of “Auld Lang Syne” to modern English retains melismas as intended by Robert Burns.**

### Last line of the first verse (original by Robert Burns)

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And **auld lang syne?**”

Last line of the first verse (modern English version by Bill Jackman)

“Should old acquaintance be forgot

And **days gone by?**”

“**And days gone by**” is sung melismatically as is “**And auld lang syne.**” Robert Burns original words and the new modern English both have four syllables (or beats). Words have not been added to convert Burns’ melismas to syllabic singing.

Last line of the chorus( original by Robert Burns)

“We’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet,

For **auld lang syne.**”

Last line of the chorus (modern English version by Bill Jackman)

“Let’s have a toast of champagne now

To **days gone by.**”

“To days gone by” is sung melismatically as is “For auld lang syne.”

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Note: This essay was not written by AI.