

Here is an article on patriotic American songs from *Cobblestone* magazine's September 2013 issue.

Patriotic Tunes

by Kathiann M. Kowalski



- 1 Throughout U.S. history, patriotic songs have rallied Americans' love for their country. Songs celebrated freedom, built pride, and brought Americans together. Patriotic songs are more than just history. They're part of our present, too. "The songs continue to resonate in our culture," says music professor Gerard Floriano at the State University of New York at Geneseo. "They stir in us feelings that are important to our humanness- feelings of family, a shared history, and promise for a better future." Here are the stories behind six timeless American songs.

Hail Columbia

- 2 Political quarrels created a quandary for Philadelphia singer Gilbert Fox. In 1798, a little more than a decade after the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), Fox was preparing a concert program. He knew that any English tunes would bring boos from Democratic Republicans. Federalists would frown on any French songs.
- 3 So, Fox asked lawyer Joseph Hopkinson for help. Hopkinson wrote "Hail Columbia" to the tune of "The President's March." German American musician Philip Phile had composed the music several years earlier, and a band had played it at George Washington's inauguration. (Columbia was a nickname for the United States.) On April 25, 1798, Fox sang Hopkinson's lyrics: "Firm, united let us be, rallying round our liberty." After cheers and repeated encores, the crowd began singing along. "Hail Columbia" enjoyed popularity through the 19th century. Today, the tune typically announces the vice president. "Hail to the Chief" is played for the president's arrival.

The Star-Spangled Banner

- 4 The War of 1812 gave America "The Star-Spangled Banner." Lawyer Francis Scott Key wrote its lyrics right after the Battle of Fort McHenry in 1814. The day before, Key and diplomat John Skinner had boarded a British ship in the Chesapeake Bay to negotiate the release of Dr. William Beanes. Beanes had been captured by the British and detained. The British agreed to release him, but they refused to allow any of the Americans to leave until their planned attack was over.
- 5 For 25 hours, the British bombarded Fort McHenry, which protected Baltimore Harbor. Key spent an anxious night on the British ship. The next morning, he could see that the American flag was still flying. The British attack had failed. A relieved Key started scribbling "Defense of Fort McHenry" on an envelope. After returning to shore, Key's lyrics were printed and distributed. Key's words helped many Americans see the flag as an important American symbol. And "The Star-Spangled Banner" became the nation's official anthem in 1931.

Battle Hymn of the Republic

- 6 "Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written by Julia Ward Howe after she heard an older song called "John Brown's Body." "John Brown's Body" was a popular tune sung by Union soldiers during the Civil War (1861-1865). Howe found inspiration for her new verses after visiting Union troops in northern Virginia in 1861. The Atlantic Monthly paid her five dollars for the poem in 1862. It became a famous Civil War marching tune and today is one of America's most treasured songs.

America the Beautiful

- 7 An 1893 hike up Colorado's Pikes Peak inspired educator Katharine Lee Bates to write her celebratory ode to the nation, "America the Beautiful." The Congregationalist published the poem in 1895, and people loved it. They sang it to dozens of different tunes, including "Auld Lang Syne."
- 8 In 1904, minister Charles Barbour joined Bates' lyrics to the music we sing today. Barbour chose "Materna," a hymn that Samuel A. Ward wrote in 1882. The song was so popular that many people wanted it to become the national anthem of the United States. "It covers the whole range of what we are and the majesty of the landscape," notes music professor Caroline Stoessinger at the City University of New York. "'America the Beautiful' is a noble, beautiful tune."

You're a Grand Old Flag

- 9 George M. Cohan's first title for a 1906 song from his musical George Washington, Jr., was "You're a Grand Old Rag." His inspiration came from a chance meeting with a Civil War veteran who still carried a tattered flag from the 1863 Battle of Gettysburg. People thought that the word rag was disrespectful, so Cohan changed the words. The song--and his play--were a hit. Later, World War I (1914-1918) cemented the song's place among America's beloved patriotic tunes. Cohan's other

famous hits include "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy." Despite that song's words, Cohan was born on July 3--not the Fourth of July.



God Bless America

- 10 Composer Irving Berlin wrote the first version of "God Bless America" in 1918, near the end of World War I. However, the song wouldn't work with his army musical show, Yip Yip Yaphank. It sat in a file for two decades. Then, in 1938, singer Kate Smith wanted a special song for the 20th anniversary of the end of World War I. Her manager approached Berlin, and he remembered "God Bless America." He dug out the song and updated it. Smith sang it on her November 10, 1938, radio show. It gave hope to a nation still suffering through the economic hardships of the Great Depression. Later, the song's message of peace sustained Americans' spirits during World War II (1939-1945). "God Bless America" brought hope to the country once again after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Some professional sports teams have incorporated the song into their events.

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