

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Anacreontic Song (2)

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(Ralph Tomlinson)

To Anacreon, in Heav'n, where he sat in full glee,
A few sons of harmony sent a petition,
That he their inspirer and patron would be;
When this answer arrived from the jolly old Grecian --
 Voice, fiddle and flute,
 No longer be mute.

 I'll lend ye my name, and inspire ye to boot...
And, besides, I'll instruct ye, like me, to entwine,
The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine.

The news through Olympus immediately flew;
Where Old Thunder pretended to give himself airs --
If these mortals are suffer'd their scheme to pursue,
There's devil a goddess will stay above stairs.

 Hark! already they cry,
 In transports of joy.
 A fig for Parnassus! to Rowley's we'll fly;
And there, my good fellows, we'll learn to entwine,
The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine.

The yellow-hair'd god, and his nine fusty maids,
To the hill of old Lud will incontinent flee.
Idalia will boast but of tenantless shades,
And the biforked hill a mere desert will be.

 My thunder, no fear on't,
 Will soon do its errand,
 And dam'me! I'll swinge the ringleaders, I warrant.
I'll trim the young dogs, for thus daring to twine,
The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine.

Apollo rose up; and said, Pr'ythee ne'er quarrel,
Good king of the gods, with my vot'ries below!
Your thunder is useless -- then, shewing his laurel,
Cry'd, *_Sic evitabile fulmen_*, you know!

 Then over each head
 My laurels I'll spread;
 So my sons from your crackers no mischief shall dread,
Whilst snug in their club-room, they jovially twine,
The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine.

Next Momus got up, with his risible phiz;

And swore with Apollo he'd cheerfully join --
The full tide of harmony still shall be his,
But the song, and the catch, and the laugh shall be mine;
Then, Jove, be not jealous
Of these honest fellows.
Cry'd Jove, We relent, since the truth you now tell us;
And swear, by Old Styx, that they long shall entwine,
The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine.

Ye sons of Anacreon, then, join hand in hand;
Preserve unanimity, friends and love.
'Tis your's to support what's so happily plan'd;
You've the sanction of gods, and the fiat of Jove.
While thus we agree,
Our toast let it be.

May our club flourish happy, united and free!
And long may the sons of Anacreon entwine,
The myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's vine.

Note: This poem, "To Anacreon in Heaven," was written in 1770 by Ralph Tomlinson, president of the Anacreontic Society, a social club of well-to-do Londoners, as the society's drinking song. It was set to music in 1771 by John Stafford Smith, an organist, composer and tenor.

About 43 years later, the American patriot Francis Scott Key, after witnessing the British attack on Fort McHenry in the War of 1812, wrote the lyrics to "The Star Spangled Banner" to the popular tune.

Nowadays, of course, the U.S. National Anthem is customarily played as a solemn hymn. The original, however, is a sprightly dance tune, and even as recently as the American Civil War, the anthem was traditionally played in a much lighter style than we are accustomed to hearing today.

Original performances on current recordings include "Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot: America's most popular songs in their original versions," on Musical Heritage Society played by a military band of the Civil War era.

The Smithsonian's Museum of American History also offers an excellent survey of the various styles of the anthem through the ages in its hourly presentation at the Fort McHenry banner display, which is definitely worth a visit.

It takes a certain imagination to stretch the sonorous tones of the anthem as we know it today to Tomlinson's original lyrics .JB

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