



The Marseillaise



La Marseillaise started life as a revolutionary battle song and a hymn to freedom. It gradually gained acceptance as a national anthem. Nowadays it is performed at most official events.

History

Following the French declaration of war on Austria in 1792, Rouget de Lisle, a French officer stationed in Strasbourg, composed the "Battle Song of the Army of the Rhine" during the night of April 25-26, in the home of citizen Dietrich, the Mayor of the city.

The song was taken up by the *fédérés* (volunteers) from Marseilles who took part in the Tuileries insurrection on August 10, 1792. It proved so successful it was declared a national song on July 14, 1795.



Banned under the Empire and the Restoration, La Marseillaise was reinstated by the July Revolution of 1830, and Hector Berlioz orchestrated the music, dedicating his composition to Rouget de Lisle.

The Third Republic (1879) established it as the French national anthem, and in 1887 an "official version" was adopted by the Ministry of War following the recommendation of a specially-appointed commission.

Also under the Third Republic, the ashes of Rouget de Lisle were transferred to Les Invalides (on July 14, 1915).

In September 1944, a circular issued by the Ministry of Education called for La Marseillaise to be sung in schools in order "to celebrate our liberation and our martyrs."



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

Its status as the national anthem was reaffirmed in the 1946 and 1958 Constitutions (article 2).

The composer



Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle, captain of engineers in the French army, was born at Lons-le-Saunier in 1760. His military career was fairly brief. As a moderate revolutionary, he was saved from the Terror (1793) by the success of his song. He also wrote a handful of romances and operas, then lived in obscurity under the Empire and the Restoration until his death, at Choisy-le-Roi, in 1836.

The music

The "Hymne des Marseillais" spread throughout Alsace, in handwritten or printed form, in a matter of weeks, before being taken up by several Paris printers. The early editions were published anonymously, casting doubt for a while on the authorship of Rouget de Lisle, who was otherwise a rather poor composer.



There is no authoritative version of La Marseillaise, it having been set to music in a variety of forms, with or without words, right from the start. In 1879, La Marseillaise was declared to be the official anthem with no indication as to the version to be used, causing considerable musical confusion whenever the work was performed by more than one band brought together for the occasion!

The 1887 commission, made up of professional musicians, settled on an official version after having reworked both the tune and the harmony.

President ValØry Giscard d'Estaing wanted the performance of the work to reflect its origins more closely and ordered it to be played at a slower tempo. The version played at official ceremonies today is adapted from the 1887 version.

La Marseillaise has also been adapted by jazz and popular musicians.



The words

I

Arise you children of our Motherland !
Oh now is here our glorious day !
Over us the bloodstained banner,
Of tyranny holds sway ! (repeat)
Oh do you hear there in our fields
The roar of those fierce fighting men?
Who came right here into our midst
To slaughter sons, wives and kin

To arms, oh citizens !
Form up in serried ranks !
March on, march on !
And drench our fields
With their tainted blood !

II

What do they want this horde of slaves,
Of traitors and conspiratorial kings ?
For whom these vile chains,
These long-prepared irons? (repeat)
Frenchmen, for us, ah! What outrage !
What methods must be taken ;
It is we they dare plan
To return to the old slavery !
To arms ! and so on

III

What! These foreign cohorts
They would make laws in our courts !
What! These mercenary phalanxes
Would cut down our warrior sons ! (repeat)
Good Lord! By chained hands !
Our brow would yield under the yoke !
The vile despots would have themselves be
The masters of destiny !
To arms ! and so on.

IV

Tremble, tyrants and traitors,
The shame of all good men !



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Tremble! Your parricidal schemes
Will receive their just reward. (repeat)
Against you we are all soldiers.
If they fall, our young heroes,
France will bear new ones
Ready to join the fight against you.
To arms ! and so on.

V

Frenchmen, as magnanimous warriors
Bear or hold back your wounds !
Spare these sad victims,
That they regret taking up arms against us ! (repeat)
But not these bloody despots !
These accomplices of Bouillø !
All these tigers who pitilessly
Ripped out their mothers' wombs !
To arms ! and so on.

VI

Supreme devotion to our Motherland,
Guides and sustains avenging hands
Liberty, oh dearest Liberty,
Come fight with your shieldings bands. (repeat)
Beneath our banner come, oh Victory,
Run at your soul-stirring cry.
Oh come, come see your foes now die,
Witness your pride and our glory.
To arms ! and so on.

1st children verse

Into the fight we to shall enter,
When our fathers are dead and gone
We shall find their bones laid down to rest
With the fame of their glories won ; (repeat)
Oh, to survive them care we not
Glad are we to share their grave
Great honor is to be our lot
To follow or to venge our brave.
To arms ! and so on.



For further information

Pierre, Constant, Les hymnes et chansons de la RØvolution, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1904.

Robert, FrødØric, La Marseillaise, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1989.

Recording

170 hymnes nationaux, Musique de la Garde RØpublicaine (Republican Guard band), 1992/1995. CorØlia, CC 895770-1 [track 57].



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In [RealAudio](#)(compressed format, but you need the corresponding plug-in), 116 Ko.

In [Wave](#)(regular and uncompressed Windows format providing better sound quality, but please note that greater downloading time is required), 660 Ko.

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