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Francis Scott Key observes the bombardment of Fort McHenry.

THE CASE FOR A NEW NATIONAL ANTHEM

By RENEE B. FISHER

With the most patriotic of patriotic holidays only a weekend away, bands around the country are rehearsing to perform, and voices are struggling to encompass, a national anthem of notorious difficulty and lack of musical distinction. Herewith are presented some little-known facts about one of the basic artifacts of our national culture.

IT TOOK 114 years, until 1931, for Congress to designate "The Star-Spangled Banner" our national anthem. At first, it was just another setting of a well-known tune; other words continued to be written for the same melody, including, for example, this Temperance version in 1843:

O who has not seen by the dawn's early light
Some poor bloated drunkard to his home weakly reeling,
With bleary eyes and red nose most revolting to sight,
Yet still in his breast not a throb of shame feeling.

And the plight he was in,
Steeped in filth to his chin,
Gave proof through the night in the gutter he'd been, etc.

Similar examples from as late as 1888 make evident that even by that date there was no particular feeling of rev-

erence toward Francis Scott Key's setting, no sense of destiny about its future. True, it appeared in most (but by no means all) of the popular patriotic song collections of the nineteenth century; but it received no more than equal billing with such songs as "Yankee Doodle" and "Hail, Columbia." Later it appeared with "America," and "The Red, White and Blue," among other favorites of the day.

Every new level of acceptance reached by "The Star-Spangled Banner" since 1890 can be traced directly to military circumstances. The first big boost came with the Spanish-American War of 1898, when Admiral Dewey designated it to be played on official occasions by the U.S. Navy. Again under the impetus of a war situation, President Wilson, in 1916—the year we entered World War I—decreed it by Executive Order to be our national anthem. Not until March 3, 1931, however, did Congress pass the bill which made it official. And this final action, as will be shown, also resulted from quasi-military pressures.

There is considerable evidence, however, that from the very beginning of the twentieth century, when "The Star-Spangled Banner" began its gradual path of military acceptance, it was not universally beloved by civilians. Editorials in such respected periodicals as *The Outlook* and *The North American*

Review criticized it in strong terms, as did many individual citizens in letters to such newspapers as the *New York Times*. Typical of these sporadic but frequent outbursts was this caustic comment in *The North American Review*:

Will not someone kindly compose a new anthem? . . . The American people have been trying in vain for nearly a century to sing it . . . the endeavor of an audience today to respond to the demand upon their patriotic spirit continues to be as pathetic as it has ever been desperate . . . after nearly a century of trying service "The Star-Spangled Banner" might well be laid upon the shelf.

Nor was the music immune to early criticism from the teaching profession. One can only guess at how much protest there must have been that led the National Education Association to direct a committee, in 1908, to try to find a more "singable" version. The committee, after a hopeless four-year deadlock, came up with a rather naïve attempt to simplify the melody by eliminating many of its most characteristic rhythmic elements. The range was untouched. The revision could hardly be deemed a success, since songbooks for both school and community use still contained various "un-singable" versions, just as they had before the attempted reform.

In 1915 and early 1916, with national

awareness and patriotic feeling at a high pitch, more and more individuals, via letters to newspapers, began to express dissatisfaction with "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a musical representation of our country. Some expressed preference for "America the Beautiful," others for "America" ("My Country, 'tis of Thee"), and even for "Yankee Doodle." There were composers who urged adoption of their own new melodic settings of the words of "America" to make it an all-American product. But this resistance was too unorganized and scattered to match the urgency brought about by our entrance into World War I. Hence President Wilson's decision.

The Twenties were not notable for national introspection. Even so, there was an abortive contest during that decade for a new national anthem, and the composer Geoffrey O'Hara brought out a newly doctored, newly copyrighted version of the old one. The tone of a review of his effort is best summarized by its headline: "Still Unsingable."

Then, in 1929, with the backing of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Congressman Hamilton Fish introduced a bill in the 69th Congress to make "The Star-Spangled Banner" our official national anthem. It never reached the floor. In the next Congressional session, Representatives Emanuel Celler and J. Charles Linthicum of Baltimore introduced similar bills which came to naught.

In May, Representative Linthicum read into the *Congressional Record* a memorandum from the Maryland State Legislature urging the adoption of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the national anthem. It recalled that on September 12, 1928, Fort McHenry had become a national shrine, and acknowledged the leadership in support of "The Star-Spangled Banner" to have come from the Society of the War of 1812.

A few days later, Congressman Linthicum read into the *Record* excerpts

from a speech he had delivered a few years earlier entitled (note the wording) "The part played by Fort McHenry and 'The Star-Spangled Banner' in our second war with Britain." He also read the names of 150 organizations, headed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who were in favor of his bill, and announced that he would present a petition to that effect when hearings were conducted.

Nothing daunted by Congressional obstinacy, the Veterans of Foreign Wars discussed the opposition with these words:

considerable opposition from . . . societies of various kinds with pacifistic leanings. "The Star-Spangled Banner" was too militant and incited audiences which sang it to warlike attitudes and actions.

When hearings on the bill were begun in January 1930, the V.F.W. had its ammunition ready—more than 6,000,000 pieces of it. It was a dramatic scene, for when before had a song had to stand trial for its life? The production was quite elaborate. As a magazine described the scene under the heading "Wanted: an Anthem":

The high-vaulted committee room resounded to a sample rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" by the U.S. Navy Band. Two sopranos sang all its four verses to prove that its words were not too difficult, that its pitch was not too high . . .

Captain Joyce, of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, conceded opposition in these words:

The song does have a flavor of war, but its primary viewpoint, like that of our nation, is constructively peaceful.

He told this anecdote:

I stood on San Juan Hill in '98 and heard four bands play that tune. All around me in pup tents men were lying sick with fever, but when they heard

that glorious old tune, every last man somehow got to his feet.

From this he concluded that to these men "The Star-Spangled Banner" would always be the national anthem (whether legally so or not).

But all these remarks were mere preliminaries. The heart of the argument for approval lay in the presentation by Captain Joyce of a petition said to contain more than 6,200,000 signatures of Americans who asked that "The Star-Spangled Banner" be declared the national anthem. One New York newspaper described this as

fifty miles of paper . . . collected largely through the efforts of Captain Joyce. Credit also is given to the American War Mothers . . .

How did the opposition express itself thereafter? Anti-climactically, one cannot help concluding. Kitty Cheatham, a music teacher and amateur musicologist, quoted from a pamphlet she had published privately some years before, denouncing (with strong Temperance overtones) the original words of the song on which the anthem is based; also, still quoting from her pamphlet, she denounced the quality of the music and the war-like flavor of Key's words. Miss Cheatham further quoted dissenting editorial opinions such as this from a Washington, D.C. newspaper.

It is absurd to suppose that an act of Congress could preserve "The Star-Spangled Banner" if the people no longer recognized it as an inspiration to patriotism.

A New York editorial commented:

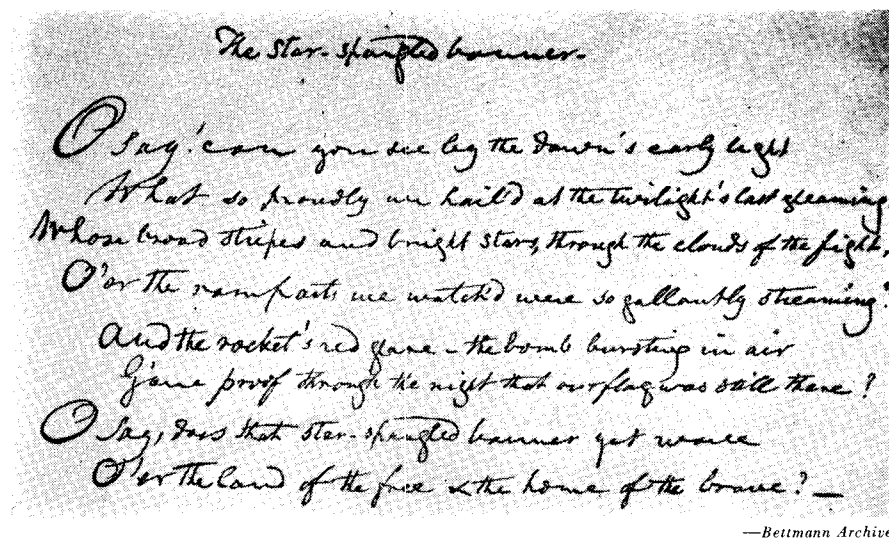
Not only is the music inappropriate and the meter clumsy and halting, but the thought is pompous and childishly braggart.

Her lone congressional support came from Congressman H. C. Johnson of North Dakota, who said:

It is a war song born under the roaring of guns, and is therefore permeated with the spirit of war, rather than the higher and nobler ideals of Americanism. . . . The words apply to a particular event and are too descriptive to be remembered. Why should such words as "Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution" be incorporated in our national anthem? Americanism means love of home, love of country, love of all humanity.

On this eloquent but relatively ineffectual note did the opposition rest its case. A stroke of showmanship, such as asking the congressmen to sing one stanza, would have made the spectacle less one-sided. But none was forthcoming.

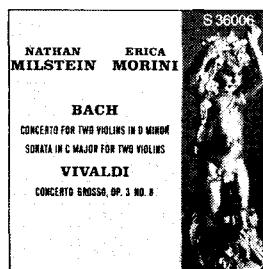
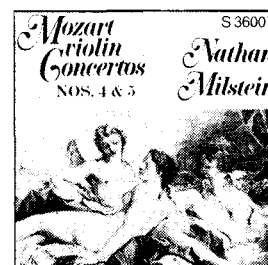
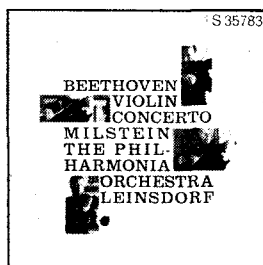
The hearing and its extensive press coverage stimulated at least some reaction from the admitted 10 per cent of
(Continued on page 57)



—Bettmann Archive.

The original Francis Scott Key draft of *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

Tear out this page. With his two dazzling new Prokofiev concertos illustrated at the right—and with the eight albums below—Nathan Milstein has now recorded for Angel the major violin concerto literature—and some fascinating novelties besides. A more distinguished collection is difficult to imagine. Angel suggests you keep the advertisement until you are ready to assemble the albums in this collectors' series for your own library.



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Pro Musica in Retrospect

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AN APPROPRIATE epitaph for the late Noah Greenberg might very well be: The Right Man at the Right Time. He had the vision to see the job that was ready to be done and he had the ability to do it. And it may very well be, when the history of our times is written, musically we will be remembered as a period of rediscovery and reappraisal. It could even develop that our composers, many of whom have been feverishly striking out in any direction so long as it was new, will eventually find themselves on the paths of long forgotten traditions. Of course Noah Greenberg did not start it all—this return to the middle ages, the renaissance and the baroque is not something that suddenly happened in our time. A century ago scholars had begun exploring forgotten repertoires and publishing collected editions of the old masters.

In my own generation, many eyes and ears were opened by the annual visits of The English Singers, a sextet seated informally around a table, who sang madrigals with a precision that was a revelation at the time and a spirit so infectious that houses were sold out wherever they sang. The work of a group in Brussels, called Pro Musica Antiqua, founded and directed by the American-born Safford Cape, became known in this country through the recordings of Curt Sachs's *Anthologie Sonore*, the first extensive scholarly historical series of discs. When Paul Hindemith came to Yale in 1940 he influenced a generation of students in his Collegium Musicum. Greenberg, who died on January 8 at the age of forty-six, could hardly have known The English Singers first hand (their records only partially account for their brilliant success), but he did know the work of Safford Cape (paying him a real compliment when he named his group), and some of

the artists who have worked with him had come under Hindemith's spell.

Noah Greenberg never considered himself a musicologist. His musical education was informal. Born April 9, 1919, he grew up in New York, where he attended public schools. From 1944 to 1949 he served in the merchant marine, which experience at least gave him a chance to collect himself. "At sea you have a great deal of time to think," he once said, "and I thought." So on emerging in 1949 he took over the direction of the chorus of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. His work attracted the attention of a recording company, and he was invited to work up some programs of older music. Greenberg undertook the assignment, but he did not use his ILGWU chorus, feeling that more could be made of the music with professional solo voices. His timing was good, for in our day of proficient and musicianly singers he was able to assemble a sextet both capable of mastering the intricacies of the music and susceptible to his ideas of style. With the gradual addition of appropriate instruments (several of the singers doubling on some of them) and a larger choir available when needed, the entire repertoire of early music was open to him.

The New York Pro Musica Antiqua (the last word was later dropped) came into being in 1952. Part of its success was due to the fact that Greenberg knew from the beginning just what he wanted to do. He knew that the earliest music was intended to be performed as well as listened to; therefore the enjoyment of the performers was essential. Such performances must not be too formal. So the Pro Musica grew, and it found a public ready and waiting.

But Greenberg's ambitions did not stop with giving concerts. He wanted to learn everything there was to know about idiomatic performance, and he wanted to spread the gospel. From the beginning it was his dream to establish a research library and set up educational facilities. He would sponsor seminars in which performers in his group could teach their knowledge and skills to others. For his performances he must accumulate an impressive collection of instruments. Thus Pro Musica could also be a center of information on the care and maintenance of these. And so he sought foundation help. He was twice successful. First the Rockefeller Foundation enabled him to set up his group



Noah Greenberg—"The right man at the right time."

on a permanent basis as a performing organization and as a center of authority on performing practice. Later the Ford Foundation made it possible to establish the library and embark on some of the planned educational activities. The library has been developed along rather broad lines, with sets of many scholarly editions and most of the recent reprints of older music, with books centering around the medieval, renaissance and baroque periods but reaching in many side directions.

The performing career of the New York Pro Musica was successful from the start. The first recordings were a help in establishing the reputation of the group, for they appeared in the early years of LP, when any revival of early music was guaranteed a hearing. In this case not only did the music prove as delightful as it was novel, but the performances had a vitality too often lacking in those days of wholesale recording. The variety made possible by alternating vocal and instrumental music was a strong selling point. Soon the group was touring extensively. One of their greatest successes was the production in 1958 of the medieval sacred drama called *The Play of Daniel*, produced first at the Cloisters in uptown New York, later repeated in the Riverside Church and in St. George's. Every care was taken to enact the drama as it must have been done in its own day, even to utilizing a variety of obsolete instruments. In 1963 this success was matched with another such revival, *The Play of Herod*.

Since throughout its career the Pro Musica was continuously active in the recording studios, the growth and expansion of its repertoire can be studied along with the steady rise toward perfection in performance. The first recordings bore the Esoteric label. There were