

Narrative for

Broadside to Anthem: Music of the War of 1812

By David Hildebrand

Featured musical selections are underlined, underscored selections are not.

1 "Sacket's Harbor" -- Laura Hildebrand, violin; David Hildebrand, piano

(0:23 in) Music played a central role in communicating facts, ideas, and opinions in the days before recorded sound and radio broadcasts. This may seem surprising, but it was especially true in America at the turn of the 19th century. Our unproven union was wracked then by partisan politics. We were struggling to build a navy and fighting an undeclared war with France. Our vulnerable merchant shipping was regularly violated, and an unsuccessful trade embargo was causing economic upheaval. The continued impressment of American sailors led the United States to the arguably foolhardy act of declaring war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812. For the next two and half years, battles at land and sea raged sporadically. The British army reduced parts of Washington D.C. to ashes, yet were unable to penetrate Baltimore's defenses. An overwhelming defeat of British forces occurred at New Orleans in January, 1815, just after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. All of these events are recorded in song.

2 I am David Hildebrand, inviting you to join me for the next hour, as we take a musical journey through the war of 1812 in America, told through the lyrics of that era. Two hundred

years ago ballads conveyed the news and spread opinions outward to many citizens, often in colorful detail, (:18 in, begin underscore "British Grenadiers" -- David Hildebrand, piano) sometimes through biting criticism, and occasionally with clever humor. Parody was the favored form for song-writing around 1812, that is, the writing of new lyrics to older, familiar tunes. Parody was, in fact, what lead Francis Scott Key to craft a new set of lyrics known first as "The Defence of Ft. M'Henry," then, later, as "The Star-Spangled Banner." Thus the title of our program: "Broadside to Anthem: Music of the War of 1812."

Before and during the Revolution Yankee Doodle circulates with lyrics on politics, battles, and surrenders. More telling to our period, a parody of Yankee Doodle appeared in 1798, popularly known as "The Way to Avoid War." It clearly advises Americans to "guard your coast" and praises John Adams as the man to lead our nation when threatened both by England and France. But under President Thomas Jefferson the U.S. steered a weaker, less centralized course and American ships were left unprotected and thus freely attacked. Jefferson's ill-advised response was to impose a trade embargo in 1807, a move that quickly created turmoil in America's fragile economy. A Philadelphia magazine expressed its views by publishing this parody of another tune, entitled "The Embargo:"

3 "The Embargo" -- Ginger Hildebrand, dulcimer; David Hildebrand, voice

(3:19 in) These 12 verses were crafted in 1807 by Henry Mellen, who set them to a widely known tune called "Come Let us Prepare." Mellen, a New Hampshire Federalist, dramatically

gives voice to the widespread opposition against the embargo, how and why it harmed our shipping, fishing, and farming. The song blames Jefferson for damaging our country more than the intended target, Great Britain, thus aiding the French. The author also cleverly stretches what rhymes with Embargo, providing a bit of comic relief as well.

4 Almost immediately another parody of this same tune appears in favor of the Embargo, opening with the lines:

(:06 in) "The Embargo" (parody verse) -- Ginger Hildebrand, dulcimer; David Hildebrand, Voice

5 In 1808, as pressure mounted against the embargo, Jefferson was forced to repeal it. This caused widespread celebration, leading to more songs. Follow these clever lyrics, especially the focus upon being able to enjoy brandy again. These verses specifically celebrate July 4th as Independence Day, and dare Napoleon and the British both to attack us. And yes, this one is to the tune of Yankee Doodle.

(:22 in) "The Death of the Embargo" -- David Hildebrand, voice and harpsichord

6 This was one of many songs on this topic, and Yankee Doodle was a favorite choice -- being a tune commonly called upon to mock, tease and generally offend the intended target. Americans sang such parodies as this from published magazines and newspapers, and from

broadsides. Before sheet music was widely affordable, and when only the wealthiest had the pianos, guitars, and the lessons needed to read musical notation, broadsides flourished as a cheap and easy format for new song texts. These single sheets contained only the words; it was expected that anyone, regardless of training, could match a broadside's lyrics to the intended tune on the spot. Again, this is what we call parody. In Boston in 1814 over 300 broadside titles were available for sale; not all concerned the war or were intended to be sung even, but quite a few were both.

Certainly the repeal of the embargo did not solve our national problems, and members of congress known as the War Hawks, like Henry Clay, pushed for war as a solution. A song called "American Star" began to circulate widely as early as 1808 as a dramatic call to arms. Words crafted by the radical songwriter John M'Creery of Petersburg, Virginia, involve harsh imagery - ruffians will soon be savaging our land and wives and daughters, so we should be beating the drum and sounding the bugle, and grabbing our rifles.

7 ["American Star"](#) -- David Hildebrand, voice; Ginger Hildebrand guitar

(3:36 in) American Star flourished as sung to a tune many Americans knew from a ballad opera called "The Poor Soldier," then very popular. You may have noticed how M'Creery's third verse hearkened back to Washington and other heroes of the American Revolution. The whole song found its way into 14 various publications in addition to many newspapers during the war. The third verse survives to the present day in "The Sacred Harp" and other shape note hymnals; thereby spreading the song to the rural west and south. One other point of interest in this song -

- called the American STAR, it also contains a line about our striped banner flying like so many Americans, Francis Scott Key surely knew this song.

8 So the war hawks had their way and the fighting began. Things got off poorly on land -- but for some reason, few people crafted songs about our losses in Canada, except the Canadians themselves. Makes sense, really. (:11 in begin underscore "Flowers of Edinburgh" -- David Hildebrand, piano)

Yet at sea things were different. One of the earlier important American naval victories occurred in October, 1812, when Stephen Decatur in the frigate *United States* took the British ship *Macedonian*, and the brilliant victory soon found its way into song. We don't know who wrote the lyrics, but the choice of "Liberty Tree" as the melody hearkens back to an important American parody written by Thomas Paine in 1776.

9 "Decatur and the Navy" - Ginger Hildebrand, voice; David Hildebrand, voice

(2:00 in) While this song primarily celebrates an 1812 victory, Decatur had become a household name long before, due to his daring feat in Tripoli during the Barbary Wars. Against all odds he had rescued the crew of an American frigate under frightening circumstances. Here we have an important foreshadowing of "The Star-Spangled Banner," since Francis Scott Key's first use of that tune was for a dinner in 1805 honoring Decatur upon his triumphal return to the United States.

10 Stephen Decatur's name appears, along with those of Oliver Hazard Perry, James Lawrence, Issac Hull and other successful commanders, in the lyrics of many songs of this era. At times their names are rattled off in groups, along with the names of their ships. Ships and heroes lend their names to instrumental tunes and as well as to songs. It had become traditional, years earlier, to honor Washington, von Steuben, Franklin and other Revolutionary heroes through the titles of marches and quicksteps, dirges, and dances like the minuet and hornpipe.

11 Here is Madison's March -- proudly composed and published by immigrant musician Alexander Reinagle. Laid out as was typical in two sections, notice how this modern performance of Madison's March follows the tradition of embellishing the repeats of both sections:

(:17 in "[Madison's March](#)" -- Jonathan Palmer Lakeland, piano)

12 "[Sacket's Harbor](#)" -- Laura Hildebrand, violin; David Hildebrand, piano

(:14 in) Easily available and cheap, violins or fiddles vastly outnumbered all other instruments in those days -- they were perfect for accompanying dancing. It was upon a fiddle that the young slave Paul Jennings played "The Presidents' March" at Octagon House, in February 1815, to celebrate the final ratification of the "Treaty of Peace and Amity." What you're hearing now is a country dance tune entitled "Sackett's Harbor." An important center for

American naval command and shipbuilding at the east end of Lake Ontario, Sackett's Harbor was twice defended successfully against British attack. Therefore the name took on boasting privileges and was perfect for the title of a dance tune. Interestingly, during the American Revolution some dance tunes were borrowed from English traditions and simply given new names, like "Valley Forge," which was before known as Felton's Gavotte. By 1812, though, instrumental tunes like "Sackett's Harbor" were for the most part newly composed melodies.

13 "[Hull's Victory](#)" -- Ginger Hildebrand, dulcimer

Here is "Hull's Victory," the widely popular dance tune -- there was a song written under this title as well. Isaac Hull famously commanded the US frigate *Constitution*, the ship that became known as "old ironsides" after British cannonballs bounced off her reinforced sides. This victory, that is against The *Guerriere*, was the first of America's major triumphs early in the war.

Still fairly early into the war, American naval successes began to pile up. On the heels of Hull's triumph came that of Commodore Jacob Jones, whose sloop *Wasp* took the British sloop *Frolic* on October 18, 1812. Before this year was over Americans were boasting and singing of a series of naval victories -- and the fact that our few ships were engaging and defeating those of the world's most powerful navy, well, this gave us something to boast about. The term "tar" was slang for sailor then, and Americans were proud to call themselves Yankees, so the title of our next song is concise -- "Yankee Tars." At least three other period songs share this title, but

this setting stands out by being a parody of the very old and common ballad tune known as "Derry Down," named after its chorus.

14 Here is a great example of a song designed to be sung by a soloist, yet featuring a simple chorus to be joined in by all gathered -- at a tavern, on board ship, at a formal dinner, wherever.

(:10 in "Yankee Tars" -- David Hildebrand, voice and guitar)

15 (begin underscore "British Grenadiers" -- David Hildebrand, piano)

A truly clever parodist would put some real thought into the choice of a tune to use. Yankee Doodle wasn't the only one with a strong symbolic association. The unofficial anthem of the British army, for instance, dating from well before the Revolution, was a song called "The British Grenadiers." Its tune when played on fifes or other outdoor instruments is strikingly powerful and appropriately evokes British might. What better way for Americans to mock the British than by turning their own song back against them? In 1774 and '76 colonists Joseph Warren and Jonathan Mitchell Sewell did just that, parodizing the British Grenadiers with new words about protecting American liberties and trusting in George Washington. It must have made the enemy seethe.

Fifty years later "An Old War Song of '76 new Vamped" appears -- an extra layer of meaning now sits atop this melody in 1812: we had invoked this fundamentally British tune successfully before for the heroes of '76, so why not again now? Several verses remain barely

altered from the 1770s, others strike out at specific Englishmen of 1812. Best of all is a new term introduced in verse 6, for which you should listen carefully:

16 ["Old War Song of `76"](#) - David Hildebrand, voice

17 (underscore "[James Madison My Jo](#)" -- David Hildebrand, piano)

Did you catch verse 6? Damn'd Yankees? Makes most of us think of a famous movie and musical, yet the term seems to have come of age during the war of 1812. In the printed source from which I sang this, a newspaper published in October, 1814, the term is printed in italics and there is an asterisk right after it. Damn'd Yankees is then defined at the bottom of the page as - *an epithet with which British Officers are pleased to honor all natives of the United States.*

Let's examine the politics of the war itself -- things had changed drastically since our song about "The Embargo" and the issues of 1807. Our next piece is a musical retrospective on what was referred to by his detractors as "Mr. Madison's War." Dating first to his inaugural year of 1809, a song in praise of Madison appears in print. But almost immediately an answer arrives from the other side -- and by 1816 the following, scathing verses have evolved, as published in Alexandria, Virginia:

18 ["James Madison My Jo"](#) -- David Hildebrand, piano and voice

(3:33 in) Like an inside joke you don't get, most people today would miss the humor in the title and recurring line "James Madison My Jo." But many then knew the Scottish song "John Anderson, My Jo" about an aging infirm man whose wife sings of those better days now behind him. Though a true political genius, and indispensable to the shaping of our nation, Madison himself was much older by then and quite small in size and far from robust in health -- it was a perfect melodic match for those wanting to mock him.

19 Francis Scott Key knew and liked the original song "John Anderson, My Jo" well enough to compose several alternative verses in 1842, shortly before he died. And did you notice that this melody is very much a predecessor of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," just in a different meter?

(:17 in) [-- sing:]

That you can't cure nor we endure James Madison my Jo

And we'll all feel gay when Johnny Comes marching home

20 "[Jackson's Welcome Home](#)" -- John Burkhalter , recorder

(:07 in) "Jackson's Welcome Home" composed by the Irish piper Walter Jackson, emerges as a popular dance tune a decade or two before the Battle of New Orleans. It appears both in manuscript and printed sources, and joins a host of other pieces later played to honor Andrew

Jackson. "Jackson's Welcome Home:"

[21] John Carroll, an army musician stationed at Ft. Niagara in the years leading up to 1812, must have been quite the character. Legend has this Irish fiddler playing tricks on the Commandant and being confined for his insolence. Carroll's extensive music manuscript survives, filled with many of his own compositions, including this piece, appropriately entitled the "Ft. Niagara Quickstep."

(:22 in "[Ft. Niagara Quick Step](#)" -- John Burkhalter , recorder; David Hildebrand, piano

[22] "Lilli-bur-lero" -- David Hildebrand, piano

(:07 in) "Lilliburlero," as a song of resistance of the Irish against England, dates back to 1687. From around 1750 many Americans heard the melody of "Lilliburlero" as it was re-used in the popular *Beggar's Opera*; and by 1765 it was recycled again as a protest song against unfair taxation. Perhaps the increased use of the term "Jonny Bull" to symbolize England inspired an anonymous lyricist to come up with this song, published in at least a half a dozen American sources between 1813 and 1818. In it, "Lilliburlero" is now "Lillbullero." The following nine verses largely boast about Capt. Hull of the *Constitution*, but they also smack of nationalism, patriotism, and the justifications of war.

(:53 in) "[Lilli-bull-ero](#)" -- David Hildebrand, voice and guitar

23 Before moving on to the curious background to our national anthem, let's listen to one last song of the war of 1812 --- one perhaps not resurrected before now in the past 200 years. It's a "Yankee Doodle" parody entitled simply: "The Battle of Baltimore." In other words, it is about the very same events surrounding Francis Scott Key in the fall of 1814, in and near Baltimore, Maryland. Among the critical differences between these two songs, "The Battle of Baltimore" and "The Star-Spangled Banner," the "Yankee Doodle" parody is descriptive and full of detail -- it names commanding officers, American and British, and it alludes to the burning of Washington and the intense preparations by the Americans to defend Baltimore. Typical of song set to the "Yankee Doodle" tune, "The Battle of Baltimore" is a boasting, taunting song -- it mocks Gen. Ross who was killed during the land attack, and his body to be sent back to England was pickled in a cask of rum. As a gentleman, Key would never have chosen "Yankee Doodle" for his much loftier lyrics, being focused more on the justifications of war and the symbolic blessings from heaven. A prolific poet, Key carefully arranges the images in his verses and the choice of adjectives to bring them to mind; the longer, more interesting melody of "The Star-Spangled Banner" allows for an artful combination of syllables and musical notes. So the "Yankee Doodle" you're about to hear is just the opposite -- low and rude and hindered by brief phrases and limited rhyme structures. How differently can the same story be told!

(1:28 in "[The Battle of Baltimore](#)" -- David Hildebrand, voice and harpsichord)

24 Recall that Francis Scott Key had written a song for a dinner back in 1805. The melody that he chose to set at that time was a very popular tune by then -- let's trace it backwards a bit. To do so we need to go to London in the 1760s. For decades in London, and in Edinburgh, Scotland, had been a tradition of gentlemen's clubs; places where men of the upper classes could come together to eat and drink and talk and sing. Music became an important part of this sort of club life. Clubs earlier on had taken on names like the Sublime Society of the Beefsteak, and so by the 1760s this particular group of men decided they wanted something very clever. They looked back into Greek history and discovered "The Songs of Anacreon." Anacreon was a Greek poet, born in the 5th century B.C. He had written his songs about women and wine. So these men realized -- "Hey! We have something in common. Let's take the name of Anacreon." And they formed the club; it became very popular. So the president of the club at one point, probably around 1765, composed a song -- he actually wrote the lyrics, first. He wrote them "To Anacreon in heaven, would you be our sponsor?" (imagining they could talk to him, up in the clouds) and Anacreon imaginatively answers back, "Oh, yes, of course! If you follow my ideals of women and wine, that is, of Venus and Bacchus." Sometime shortly after, John Stafford Smith was brought in. Now he was a professional musician, not an upper class wealthy man, but he was a very famous musician and he had interacted, for many years, with these clubs. So he composed a beautiful, soaring melody to go with these words -- a club song. Let's hear how this song sounded when it was first published around 1779:

25 ["The Anacreontic Song"](#) -- David Hildebrand, Alexa Cottrell, Nicole Fragala, Amanda Gillin, Elizabeth Frasciello, Chris Filice, Jamison Barrett, and Giancarlo D'elia, Sam Ward

(1:53 in) What you just heard were the first and last verses, done in club style, of "To Anacreon in Heaven," which also became known as "The Anacreontic Song." This melody really took off. People took great interest in it. By the 1790s there was a move to introduce women members into the club, which became such a controversy that the club itself folded forever. Rather ironic, if we go back to the women and wine thing, if you think about it.

26 I take you now to Annapolis, the current as well as colonial capitol of Maryland, the location of St. John's College, which Key attended during the 1790s. Recorded in the very building in which he studied, now known as MacDowell Hall, and sung by current St. John's College students, here is a special, 3-part arrangement of "The Anacreontic Song" apparently created by John Stafford Smith himself, this version was published, coincidentally, the very year Key graduated in Annapolis:

(:29 in) ["The Anacreontick Song, Harmonized by the Author"](#) -- The Sons of Harmony, St. John's College, Annapolis -- Peter Kalcavage, director

(:52 in) The arranger cleverly alters the main melodic motives by repeating, harmonizing, and embellishing the very phrases we associate with our national anthem today. The performers purposefully allow themselves to be transported, indeed carried away in the spirit of Bacchus

himself -- this is appropriate for the original lyrics and intended function of this song, that is, reinforcement of a gentleman's social club of the very reasons they gather -- laughter, mirth, food, drink, and vivacious camaraderie.

Yes, it was a drinking song, and as such it came across the ocean to America in published form and people began to write new parodies. People began to invoke American patriotic themes to this drinking song, beginning with a song honoring George Washington on his birthday in 1798. This same year another parody is written: "Adams and Liberty; or, The Boston Patriotic Song" begins:

Ye sons of Columbia who bravely have fought . . .

The sense has shifted, and there are references back to Greece and Rome, but the emphasis on the song, as it evolves in America, becomes patriotic.

I mentioned before Francis Scott Key's setting of this tune for Stephen Decatur in 1805. In verse 3 of that setting is a reference to "The Star-Spangled flag of our nation." And the choruses rhyme with "wave" and "brave," although at that time it's the laurel and the olive. The days and months leading up to the British attack on Baltimore, by that time there had already been dozens of new settings of this melody taking on war themes as well -- songs about the heroes, some of whom we've already sung in this program.

Indeed, Francis Scott Key did not write a poem. He did not have a piece of paper and hand it to someone and they said: "Oh, let's go find a melody." That's not how it happened. It emerged

as a parody -- the lines unfolded in his mind. And they circulated first through the streets of Baltimore on a broadside entitled "The Defence of Ft. M'Henry." It didn't even take on the name "The Star-Spangled Banner" for a month or two. But when those broadsides hit the streets, with a short synopsis of the circumstances under which Key had written these lines, it also specifies -- "to the tune: Anacreon in Heaven."

27 We close our program with a modern arrangement of the Star-Spangled Banner, first verse only as is now traditional, performed by the United States Naval Academy Glee Club.

(:09 in "[The Star-Spangled Banner](#)" -- United States Naval Academy Glee Club, Aaron Smith, director)

28 [Sacket's Harbor](#) -- Laura Hildebrand, violin; David Hildebrand, piano

Recorded at Nassau Presbyterian Church, Princeton, New Jersey, and at the United States Naval Academy and St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland

Chief Recording Engineer, John C. Baker, assisted by Sam Ward

Additional tracks courtesy of Make Your Mark Media

Written and Produced by David Hildebrand in collaboration with WWFM The Classical Network

Performances by John Burkhalter, Jonathan Palmer Lakeland, Ginger Hildebrand, Laura Hildebrand, David Hildebrand and, courtesy of Westminster Choir College, Alexa Cottrell, Nicole Fragala, Amanda Gillin, Elizabeth Frasciello, Chris Filice, Jamison Barrett, and Giancarlo D'elia

The United States Naval Academy Glee Club directed by Aaron Smith

The Sons of Harmony, St. John's College, directed by Peter Kalkavage

All music arranged by David Hildebrand, except Madison's March, by Jonathan Palmer Lakeland and The Star-Spangled Banner, United States Naval Academy Glee Club version by John Barry Talley

Copyright 2012 David K. Hildebrand

This has been a production of WWFM The Classical Network

****IMPORTANT -- all music copyright and performance right 2012 David K. Hildebrand, BMI, except Madison's March (Jonathan Palmer Lakeland) and The Star-Spangled Banner, USNA glee club version (arranged by John Barry Talley). For a license to post, re-use or otherwise broadcast or disseminate this material please contact The Colonial Music Institute at (410) 544-6149 or info@colonialmusic.org**