

All Hail for Music on the Trail:
A program featuring music from U.S. Presidential Campaigns, 1840-1964
A Constitution Week Concert and Lecture

Notes

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“Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” was the 1840 campaign slogan for Whig Party candidate William Henry Harrison (often referred to as “Old Tippecanoe”) and his running mate, John Tyler (“Ty”). Early US campaign songs such as this one generally paired a well-known tune, in this case “Little Pigs,” with a new set of lyrics. This process of grafting a new text onto an already existing melody is called “parody.” This parody praises the down-home virtues of the log cabin-dwelling/cider swilling Whig candidate and dismisses his opponent, Democrat Martin van Buren, or “little Van,” as a “used-up man.” Similarly, **“Good Hard Cider”** praises Harrison as the “Log Cabin candidate,” clearly an allusion to his so-called “humble” roots, but don’t be fooled by slick advertising, Harrison was a wealthy man! This song draws on the popular visual metaphor of the day, “up Salt River,” which was a roundabout way of referring to an opponent’s political defeat. And in this case, Harrison did win the election of 1840.

“The Toast” is a parody of “Vive la Compagnie,” an old English folksong that was adopted for political use by the Irish and the Confederacy in the 19th century. This version, published in *The Freeman’s Glee Book*, was an 1856 campaign song for the Republican candidate, John C. Fremont. Originally, “Vive la Compagnie” called for long lasting friendship and joy. With a new set of lyrics, this campaign song beckoned listeners to toast to Fremont and his hopeful election victory. Considering this song is best sung as a call-and-response, everyone could join in and advocate for Fremont! Taking on a more serious tone, **“Wake Ye Numbers!”** appears in *Songs for the Great Campaign of 1860*, a songster compiled to support the candidacy of Abraham Lincoln. Although this is a songster for Lincoln, the collection has some songs that reference the institution of slavery—a major issue in this election. The original text of “Strike the Cymbal,” from Vincenzo Pucitta’s oratorio, details David’s triumph over Goliath. G.W.C Lewis’s text imagines a different foe. His lyrics encourage listeners to vote for abolition and restore freedom to all Columbia.

C.C. Haskins composed **“Hayes is the Man”** in support of Rutherford B. Hayes during a contested, and eventually outright disputed election with claims of voter fraud. The 1876 song praises Hayes’ leadership, honesty, and integrity, and encourages voters to back his candidacy. Typical of 19th-century political songs, its simple, memorable melody was designed for public gatherings and rallies. Reflecting the intense political climate of the time, the song captures Hayes’ appeal for legitimacy from supporters and illustrates how music played a key role in political campaigning and public engagement.

“The Bourbon Democracy” is set to the comical tune of “When I was a Lad” from *H.M.S. Pinafore*, a popular operetta by Gilbert & Sullivan. Taking a cue from the original, this satirical song critiques the conservative Bourbon Democrats, a faction of the Democratic Party known for their resistance to social and political change in the post-Reconstruction era. The “Bourbon” label likened them to the French royal family that was restored to the throne after the Napoleonic Wars. This faction catered to the Southern elites, emphasizing their commitment to states’ rights, limited government, and laissez-faire economics. By using a well-known, catchy tune which is also about outdated ideologies such as rank being awarded to persistence rather than merit, the song humorously critiques the faction’s perceived stubbornness and outdated ideals. Through parody, it blends entertainment with sharp political commentary, highlighting the use of music in shaping public opinion during the Gilded Age.

Perhaps better known as “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean,” **“The Red, White, and Blue”** is a patriotic tune originally penned in 1843 by Thomas A. Beckett, but used primarily to support the 1884 Republican nominee, James G. Blaine and his running mate, John A. Logan. Although it has been suggested that the lyrics were a plagiarized version of the English poem, “Brittania, The Pride of the Ocean,” this song exudes

American spirit through its melodious images of flags flying and familiar references to the “land of the free.” Resting on a backdrop of fiscal disagreements and consistent mudslinging, “Columbia the Gem of the Ocean” provided a chance for the public to experience Blaine and Logan’s American dream, even if the November election was lost to their Democratic competitor, Grover Cleveland.

“We Will Rally for McKinley” is one of the many hearty songs in support of Pres. William McKinley in his campaign for reelection in 1900. After four years in the executive seat, the turn of the century met him with a face-off against his long-standing opponent, William Jennings Bryan. Written by W.G. Thomas, “We Will Rally for McKinley” sets the incumbent apart from his previous identity and crafts a new one, to continue drawing in the popular vote while highlighting recent, and past, victories: his valiant recovery at Cedar Creek in the Civil War and his recent participation in the Spanish-American War. It was qualities like these that helped him secure another victory to carry the US into the twentieth century.

This last song, **“Hello, Lyndon,”** takes its upbeat tune from the 1964 musical *Hello, Dolly!* It was performed at the 1964 Democratic National Convention to show support for Lyndon B. Johnson. While earlier campaigns tended to gravitate to folk tunes, in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, stage and screen music was all the rage. This song is quintessential Broadway. Carol Channing, who performed as the titular “Dolly” in the musical’s original Broadway run, performed “Hello, Lyndon” for Johnson after his inauguration.