

ROYAL MARINE BAND SERVICE

FACT SHEET



Famous Marches of the Royal Marines

'Greensleeves'

Mentioned by the Elizabethan dramatists, Nash, Heywood, Fletcher and Shakespeare. 'Let the sky rain potatoes' says Falstaff in the Merry Wives'. 'Let it thunder to the tune of Greensleeves'. The famous melody started in the reign of Henry VIII. Its lyric was first a ballad of the Spanish Armada, then an account of an execution at Tyburn, in 1588, and no less than fourteen Cavalier songs were written about it. Pepys heard it sung as 'The Blacksmith' and later, Boswell heard it sung at a 'Harvest Home'. The Victorians gave it yet another lyric and title, 'Which nobody can deny' and the melody, known to us as it was known to Falstaff under the name of Greensleeves, is still popular.

'Heart of Oak'

First sung by a Mr Champnes in 'Harlequin's Invasion', 1759. The words are by David Garrick and the music by Dr Boyce, the Kensington composer. Boswell, in his Life of Johnston, tells how he was invited to sing a typically English song, while on a visit to Corsica. 'Never did I see men so delighted with a song as the Corsicans were with Heart of Oak. Bravo Inglese! they cried. It was quite a joyous riot. I fancied myself to be a recruiting sea officer and all my chorus of Corsicans to be aboard the British Fleet'. The wonderful year of the first verse was 1759, the year of Pitt's greatest triumphs, Minden, Quiberon, and Quebec.

'The Death of Nelson'

Words by S J Arnold, music by John Braham, the singer and composer, who made his first appearance in 1787. The song was part of an Opera, 'The Americans', composed soon after the Battle of Trafalgar. Lady Hamilton, who was in a Box at one performance, interrupted the show by breaking out into ungovernable sobs half-way through the second verse on hearing this lyric for the first time. It does not please all tastes today, but has an important connection with history and the great vogue it once enjoyed because of its heavy sentiment, is typical of the early 19th Century.

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'Rule Britannia'

On August 1st, 1740, at Cliefden House, near Maidenhead, residence of Frederick, Prince of Wales, a banquet was given to commemorate the accession of George I. On this occasion a play called 'Alfred' was performed with such success that five years later the composer, Dr Arne (1704-1787), altered it into an Opera and presented it at a Drury Lane Theatre for the 'benefit' of his wife. The play was written by James Thomson (the great poet of 'The Season' who died in 1748) in collaboration with David Mallet. The famous lyric was by Thomson. Of the melody Robert Southey wrote 'It will continue to be sung so long as love of country animates the breasts of Englishmen'. And later, Richard Wagner remarked that the opening bars portrayed more than any other piece of music 'the vigour, resolution and eternal greatness of the English character'.