When the Warrior Returns

Earlier song by F. S. Key to same melody as future anthem

December 1805

Words by Francis Scott Key
Music by John Stafford Smith

(C Major • High Voice)

Edited by Mark Clague and Andrew Kuster
When the Warrior Returns, 1805  
Lyric by Francis Scott Key (1779–1843); Music by John Stafford Smith (1750–1836)

Historical Note
Key wrote the lyric “When the Warrior Returns” in late 1805 for an “entertainment” (probably in Washington, D.C.) given by grateful citizens to honor U.S. naval heroes Stephen Decatur, Jr. and Charles Stewart, the leaders of a daring 1804 raid that destroyed the captured USS Philadelphia and thus helped turn the tide of the Tripolitan War in North Africa. According to Boston’s Independent Chronicle, Key wrote the words on “an hour’s notice,” while the Maryland Gazette noted that the song was “prepared” and “sung by” Key.

The lyric’s five stanzas welcome “the warrior” and “a band of your brothers” to claim their reward of gratitude. Key, as he would for “The Star-Spangled Banner” nine years later, prefers patriotic sentiment to topical detail and never mentions Decatur or Stewart by name. Instead his language rises to the abstract in praise of the bold sons who endured, fought, and fell in “the blaze of their glory.” The third stanza establishes another trope that would return in Key’s future anthem. He signals victory using flag imagery observing in his poetic eye that the “light of the Star-Spangled flag of our nation” had obscured the Ottoman Crescent. Key undoubtedly saw the victory in religious terms as well, calling America’s foes “infilde[s]” in the fourth stanza. Yet, the closing couplet of each stanza indicates Key’s vision that patriotic heroism (the laurel) and peace (olive) are intertwined. The closing rhyme of “wave” and “brave” in each verse again anticipates “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Published as a song lyric to be sung to the melody of the London musicians’ club anthem “The Anacreontic Song,” Warrior contradicts claims by others, such as Ferdinand Durand and Key’s brother-in-law and Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney, that they had first connected the lyric of “The Star-Spangled Banner” to its English melody. Nine years earlier, Key demonstrates familiarity with the tune and its unique eight-line, nine-rhyme stanzas. Key’s poetic tag in its mixture of “laurel” and “olive,” even parallels the symbolic entwining conceit of “myrtle” and “vine” from the original 18th-c. lyric. Published in the 1857 posthumous collection of Key’s poetry, the text here has been changed in stanzas two and three for clarity and precision. It remains uncertain but is likely that Key himself corrected the text.

Performance Suggestions
As a song of celebration in praise of military heroes based on a song with the tempo marking “con spirito” [with spirit], the tempo should be faster and the overall color lighter than today’s anthem performances. The text should be declaimed clearly with a rolling triple feel and emphasis on beats 1 and 4. Originally each verse would have been sung through completely by a male soloist (mm. 1–20) with a chorus—probably made up of the party’s guests—echoing the final line (mm. 17–20), probably in unison. There is no keyboard introduction in the original source but the chorus (mm. 17–20 with pickup) can be used for this purpose. According to one source Key’s original performance was accompanied by a pair of clarinets, but any keyboard instrument can be used.

Sources
The text of this edition is taken from the 1857 collection Poems of the Late Francis S. Key, ESQ. (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers), pp. 34–36. The musical is taken from on the original 1779 imprint of “The Anacreontic Song” by Broderip in London.

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2 “Poet’s Corner,” Maryland Gazette, Annapolis (December 19, 1805), C.
When the Warrior Returns

In honor of Stephen Decatur, Jr. and Charles Stewart on their return from the war with the Barbary pirates.

Lyrics set to Smith’s arrangement of The Anacreontic Song.

Words
Francis Scott Key
(1779–1843)

Music
Anacreon in Heaven
John Stafford Smith
(1750–1836)

[Con spirito]

1. When the warrior returns, from the battle afar, To the home and the country he nobly defended, O! warm be the welcome to claim the reward of your hearts’ warm emotion, When your cause, when your honor, urged foes fled dismayed from the war’s desolation: And pale beamed the Crescent, its ultingly hear of their sons the proud story: How their young bosoms glow’d with the home and the country he nobly defended: Let the thanks due to valor now

2. Columbia! a band of your brothers be hold, Who__

3. In the conflict resist less, each toil they endured, ’Till their home and the country he nobly defended, O! warm be the welcome to claim the reward of your hearts’ warm emotion, When your cause, when your honor, urged foes fled dismayed from the war’s desolation: And pale beamed the Crescent, its ultingly hear of their sons the proud story: How their young bosoms glow’d with the home and the country he nobly defended: Let the thanks due to valor now

4. Our__ fathers, who stand on the summit of fame, Shall ex__

5. Then__ welcome the warrior returned from afar To the home and the country he nobly defended, O! warm be the welcome to claim the reward of your hearts’ warm emotion, When your cause, when your honor, urged foes fled dismayed from the war’s desolation: And pale beamed the Crescent, its ultingly hear of their sons the proud story: How their young bosoms glow’d with the home and the country he nobly defended: Let the thanks due to valor now

6. __

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When the Warrior Returns

full tide of song let his fame roll along, To the feast-flowing board let us
far distant shore, to the battle's wild roar, They rushed, your fair fame and your
each radiant star gleamed a meteor of war, And the turbaned heads bowed to its
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gratefully throng, Where, mixed with the o-live, the laurel shall wave, And
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form a bright wreath for the brows of the brave. Where, mixed with the o-live, the
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