

STAR SPANGLED MUSIC *Editions*

# The Anacreontic Song

Melodic Source of “The Star-Spangled Banner”

1775 or 1776



Words by Ralph Tomlinson  
Music by John Stafford Smith



*(C Major • High Voice)*

Edited by Mark Clague and Andrew Kuster

STAR SPANGLED MUSIC  
*Foundation*



[editions@starspangledmusic.org](mailto:editions@starspangledmusic.org)

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## The Anacreontic Song, 1775 or 1776

Melodic source of “The Star-Spangled Banner”

Lyric by Ralph Tomlinson (1744–1778); music by John Stafford Smith (1750–1836)

### Historical Note

The song that gave Francis Scott Key the melody for “The Star-Spangled Banner” was among the more popular broadside ballad tunes in the new American nation. It was created as the constitutional anthem of The Anacreontic Society, an all-male music club based in London and founded around 1766. The club drew inspiration from the sixth-century BC Greek poet Anacreon and indeed the song’s text calls upon this namesake for support. Verses 2 through 5 tell a story about Zeus (also referred to as Old Thunder, King of the Gods, and Jove) becoming concerned that club members are having so much fun that they will disrupt heaven and hell. He threatens to send lightning bolts to quash their revelry and to hang (swing) their leader. As the god of music, Apollo intervenes as does Momus (the god of mockery), and Zeus swears by the River Styx that the club will prosper. The tale is comic but its classical allusions speak to the elite cultural aspirations of the club. Their song’s final verse extolls the the virtues of “Unanimity, Friendship, and Love!”

Undoubtedly club members laughed heartily and drank deeply at meetings, and indeed the lyric toasts the club’s future in its final stanza, but the song’s purpose is distinctly different from its “drinking song” reputation. Yes, the song uses the choral refrain, fast tempo, jaunty affect, and melodic leaps common to the drinking song genre. Here, however, the purpose is to celebrate the joys of musical fellowship and thus to help attract new members. Also, the song is too long and too musically sophisticated for the typical pub ditty. To be sung by an exceptional soloist accompanied by harpsichord and with a chorus in four-part harmony, “The Anacreontic Song” required substantial skill to perform.

Anacreontic Society meetings were relatively elite affairs starting with a two-hour symphony concert. The club’s anthem was later sung after the meeting’s dinner to introduce a set of popular part songs. Professional singers, borrowed from London’s theaters, performed along with select, trained amateurs while general members joined to echo as the chorus. As a challenging song written to showcase the club’s artistic aspirations, “The Anacreontic Song” would typically have been sung by a professional, allowing him to show off his vocal talents. Thus the song’s athletic melody was never intended for mass singing.

### Performance Suggestions

Approach this song with an emphasis on text delivery and story telling; acting gestures and distinct voices for different speakers were probably used in the 18th c. but were criticized in excess. At club meetings verses would be sung by a soloist with a four-part men’s choral echo of the final lines. Group unison and SATB realizations should not be feared, however. If used, a men’s chorus can be distributed from top to bottom as T1 & B1 (top stave), T2 & B2 (lower stave). The tempo should be quick. Note the characteristic triple rhyme in measures 9, 10 and 12 of each verse. It is sometimes forced (e.g., v.1: flute, mute, and boot, but also v. 3: fear on’t, errand, and warrant, plus v. 5: jealous, fellows, and tell us). The choral refrain functions to 1) give the soloist a brief respite, 2) to affirm the text in the style of a Greek chorus, and 3) to enact ritual camaraderie. Club members would join hand-in-hand when instructed by the text of verse 6. All members likely sang in unison with the pick-up to m. 9 (While thus...), breaking into harmony at the chorus. There is no keyboard introduction in the original source, but measures 13–16 with pickup can be used. The accompanying keyboard was originally a harpsichord, but a piano can be used with limited pedaling and a light touch.

### Source

This edition is based on the original 1779 imprint by Broderip in London with its revised text.

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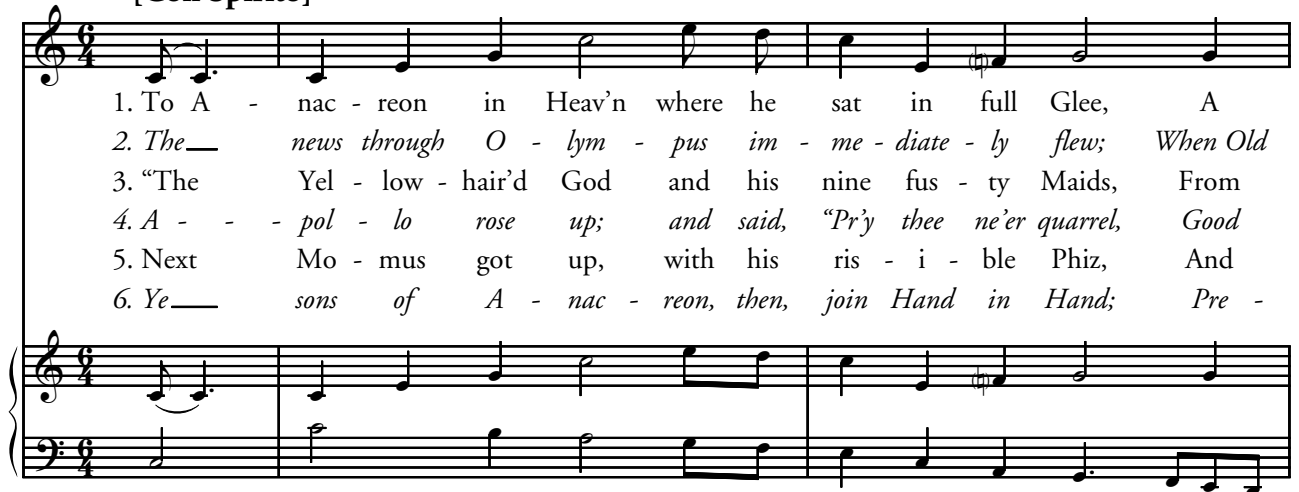
# The Anacreontic Song

Words  
Ralph Tomlinson  
(1744–1778)

Source tune for "The Star-Spangled Banner"  
1775 or 1776

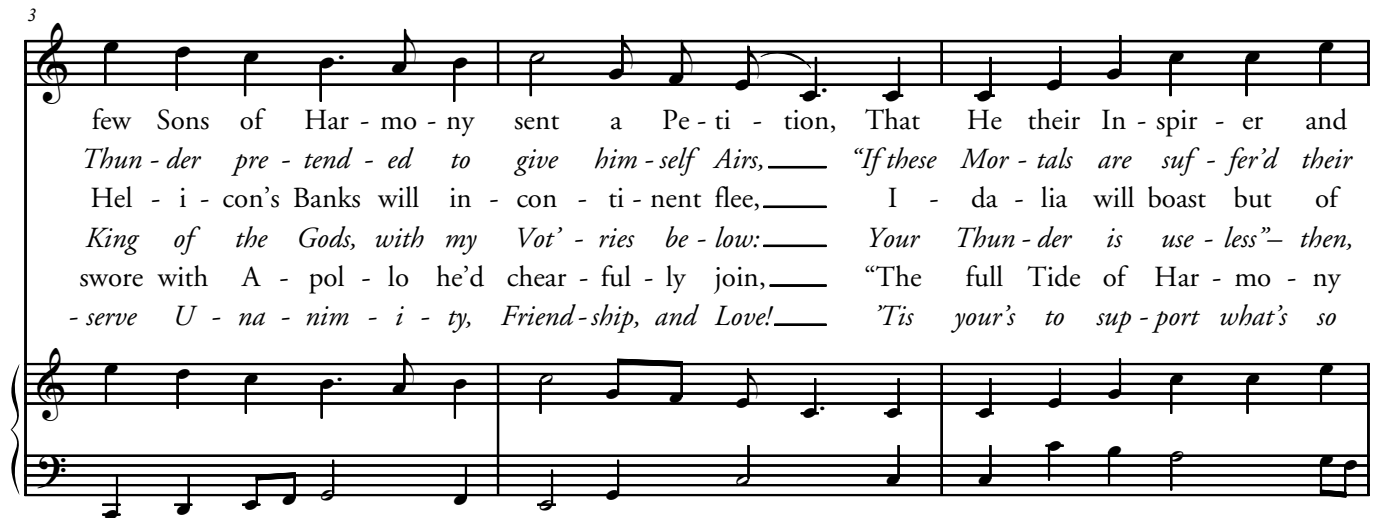
Music  
John Stafford Smith  
(1750–1836)

[Con Spirito]



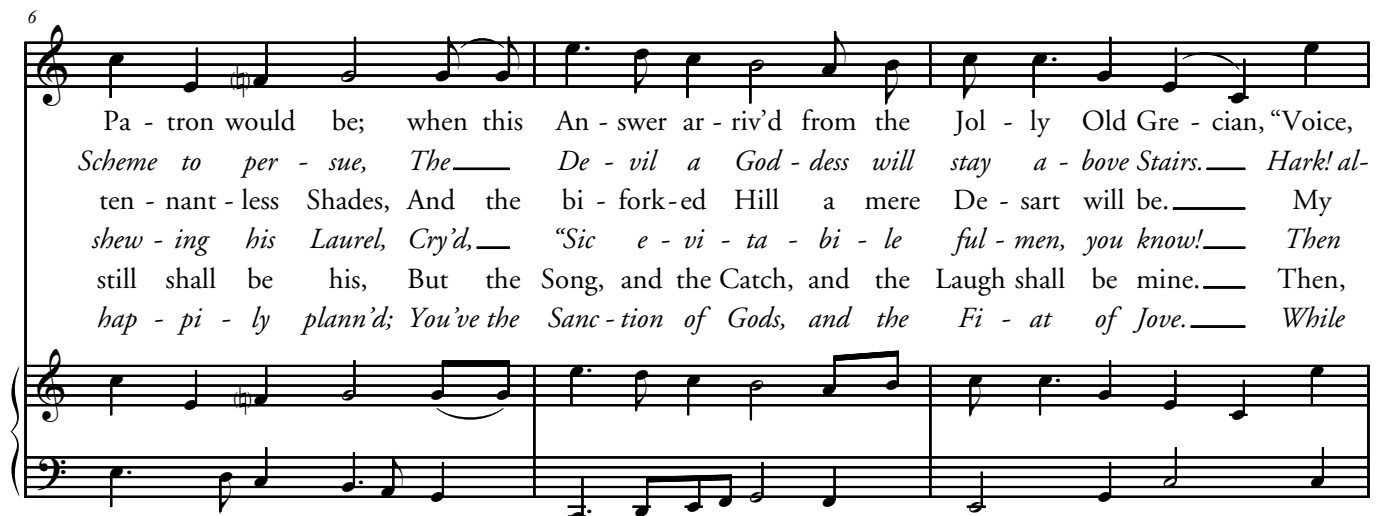
1. To A - nac - reon in Heav'n where he sat in full Glee, A  
2. The news through O - lym - pus im - me - diate - ly flew; When Old  
3. "The Yel - low - hair'd God and his nine fus - ty Maids, From  
4. A - - pol - lo rose up; and said, "Pr'y thee ne'er quarrel, Good  
5. Next Mo - mus got up, with his ris - i - ble Phiz, And  
6. Ye sons of A - nac - reon, then, join Hand in Hand; Pre -

3



few Sons of Har - mo - ny sent a Pe - ti - tion, That He their In - spir - er and  
Thun - der pre - tend - ed to give him - self Airs, — "If these Mor - tals are suf - fer'd their  
Hel - i - con's Banks will in - con - ti - nent flee, — I - da - lia will boast but of  
King of the Gods, with my Vot' - ries be - low: — Your Thun - der is use - less" — then,  
swore with A - pol - lo he'd cheer - ful - ly join, — "The full Tide of Har - mo - ny  
- serve U - na - nim - i - ty, Friend - ship, and Love! — 'Tis your's to sup - port what's so

6



Pa - tron would be; when this An - swer ar - riv'd from the Jol - ly Old Gre - cian, "Voice,  
Scheme to per - sue, The De - vil a God - dess will stay a - bove Stairs. — Hark! al -  
ten - nant - less Shades, And the bi - fork - ed Hill a mere De - sart will be. — My  
shew - ing his Laurel, Cry'd, — "Sic e - vi - ta - bi - le ful - men, you know! — Then  
still shall be his, But the Song, and the Catch, and the Laugh shall be mine. — Then,  
hap - pi - ly plann'd; You've the Sanc - tion of Gods, and the Fi - at of Jove. — While

## The Anacreontic Song

9

Fid - dle, and Flute, no long - er be mute, I'll lend you my Name and in -  
 - read - y they cry, In Trans - ports of Joy, A - - - way to the Sons of A -  
 Thun - der, no fear on't, Shall soon do it's Errand, And dam' me! I'll swinge the Ring  
 o - ver each Head My Lau - rels I'll spread; So my Sons from your Crack - ers no  
 Jove, be not jealous Of these hon - est Fellows." Cry'd Jove, "We re - lent, since the  
 thus we a - gree, Our Toast let it be. May our Club flour - ish hap - py, u -

12

- spire you to boot, And, be - sides, I'll in - struct you like me, to in - twine, The  
 - nac - reon we'll fly, And there with good Fel - lows, we'll learn to in - twine, The  
 - lead - ers, I'll warrant. I'll trim the young Dogs, for thus dar - ing to twine The  
 Mis - chief shall dread, Whilst snug in their Club - Room, they jo - vial - ly twine The  
 Truth you now tell us; And swear by Old Styx, that they long shall in - twine The  
 - nit - ed, and free! And long may the Sons of A - nac - reon in - twine The

## Chorus

15

Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac - chus - 's Vine. And be - sides I'll in - struct you like  
 Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac - chus - 's Vine. And there with good Fel - lows, we'll  
 Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac - chus - 's Vine. I'll trim the young Dogs, for thus  
 Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac - chus - 's Vine. Whilst snug in their Club - Room, they  
 Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac - chus - 's Vine. And swear by Old Styx, that they  
 Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac - chus - 's Vine. And long may the Sons of A -

The Anacreontic Song

18

me to in - twine, The Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac chus - 's Vine.  
learn to in - twine, The Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac chus - 's Vine."  
dar - ing to twine The Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac chus - 's Vine."  
jo - vial - ly twine The Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac chus - 's Vine."  
long shall in - twine The Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac chus - 's Vine."  
- nac - reon in - twine The Myr - tle of Ve - nus with Bac chus - 's Vine.

tr

tr