



Australia Now

The Australian National Anthem

'Advance Australia Fair' is the national anthem of Australia. A revised version of a late nineteenth century patriotic song, it was officially declared the national anthem on 19 April, 1984.

The composer

Peter Dodds McCormick, a Scot, composed 'Advance Australia Fair' under the pen-name 'Amicus' (amicus is the Latin word for friend). It was first performed in Sydney on Saint Andrew's Day, 1878. Peter McCormick died in 1916 and 'Advance Australia Fair' became free of copyright in 1966.

W. J. Paling & Company, the publishers of the song, described it as 'one of the three greatest songs of the British Empire'. The other two were 'God Save the King' (or 'Queen') and 'God Defend New Zealand'.

Some of the original words of the song have been changed for the official version. 'Australia's sons let us rejoice' was the original first line; this has been replaced with 'Australians all let us rejoice'. In the third verse of the original song, two lines were changed—'To make our youthful Commonwealth' became 'To make this Commonwealth of ours' and 'For loyal sons beyond the seas' became 'For those who've come across the seas'.

How 'Advance Australia Fair' became the national anthem

Although the official anthem was 'God Save the Queen' (or 'King') from 1788 to 1974, numerous commercial and official competitions were held over the years to find a substitute. The first was held in 1840.

John Dunmore Lang, who published an 'Australian Anthem' and an 'Australian Hymn' in 1826, was an early advocate of a distinctively Australian anthem;

Carl Linger of South Australia wrote 'The Song of Australia' (1860), which was suggested to the then Prime Minister in 1929 as a possible national anthem.

Among the competitions held were one by The Bulletin, which attracted 74 entries, and two by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1943 and 1945. The Commonwealth Jubilee celebrations competition in 1951 was won by Henry Krips with 'This Land of Mine'.

The issue of a truly national anthem was raised persistently before the 1956 Olympic Games, which were held in Melbourne. 'Advance Australia Fair' and 'Waltzing Matilda' were the two songs most strongly favoured then as the new anthem. 'Waltzing Matilda' was composed in 1895, with lyrics by one of Australia's best known poets, A. B. ('Banjo') Paterson.

On Australia Day, 26 January, in 1972, the number of entries (400) received in an Australia-wide national anthem quest gave an indication of the interest in a new anthem. Exactly a year later a government-sponsored competition was announced, which drew 2500 entries for the words and 1300 for the music. The judges selected six entries for the words, but rejected all the musical entries.

The polls—and what followed

The quest for an Australian national anthem continued. In a 1974 public opinion poll, which sampled an estimated 60 000 people, three songs were offered for choice: 'Advance Australia Fair', 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'Song of Australia'. 'Advance Australia Fair' polled 51.4 per cent. Following this result the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, announced that 'Advance Australia Fair' would be the national anthem, except on specifically Royal

occasions, when both it and 'God Save the Queen' would be played.

In 1976, after a change of government, 'God Save the Queen' was reinstated for Royal, vice-regal, defence and loyal toast occasions, with 'Advance Australia Fair' to be played on all other official occasions.

In May 1977, however, a national poll was conducted to ascertain the public choice of a national song. This time over seven million people were issued with ballot papers. The results were: 'Advance Australia Fair' 43.2 per cent, 'Waltzing Matilda' 28.3 per cent, 'God Save the Queen' 18.7 per cent and 'Song of Australia' 9.6 per cent.

In April 1984 the Governor-General issued a proclamation declaring that 'God Save the Queen' was designated the Royal Anthem, to be played at public engagements in Australia attended by the Queen or members of the Royal family. 'Advance Australia Fair' was finally declared to be the national anthem, and non-sexist words adopted.

Usually 'God Save the Queen' is played at the start of Royal functions and 'Advance Australia Fair' at the end, unless it is more appropriate to play both anthems at the start.

Advance Australia Fair

*Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.
Beneath our radiant Southern Cross
We'll toil with hearts and hands;
To make this Commonwealth of ours
Renowned of all the lands;
For those who've come across the seas
We've boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine
To Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.*

