

Studying the Presidential Soundscape: Trax on the Trail in the Classroom  
 Georgia Music Educators Conference  
 Classic Center, Ligotti Hall 2, Athens, GA  
 January 24, 2020



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## LESSON PLAN

### Activity: Performance History and Interpretation of an American Song: The Case of “Battle Hymn of the Republic”

#### Overview:

“Battle Hymn of the Republic” is a well-known patriotic song rooted in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist movement. You may have heard this song at camp or at church, or even at a local parade or other event of civic or national importance. Songs convey meaning through sound and text, but a song’s performance history and our own histories also inform how we interpret them with each new hearing. This exercise will provide you with an opportunity to investigate the history of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and your own history with the song, as well as consider how it communicates meaning in two memorable performances: George H. W. Bush’s funeral and Barack Obama’s Inaugural Celebration. (See Blim, Deaville, Graber, and Gorzelany-Mostak. esp. Graber at “John McCain as War Hero.”)

#### Objectives:

- Articulate the ways that songs learned in our childhood inform our conceptions of America and American identity.
- Analyze how the music, lyrics, and performance of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” evoke specific images, ideas, and emotions at the funeral of George H. W. Bush (2018) and the inaugural celebration of Barack Obama (2013).
- Investigate how music and sound can be harnessed to shape public opinion.

#### “Battle Hymn of the Republic” arr. Peter Wilhousky

Lyrics (1861): Julia Ward Howe, abolitionist writer

Tune: “John Brown’s Body”

Verse	Chorus
Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on.	Glory, Glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps, They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps; I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps: His day is marching on.	Glory, Glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me. As He died to make men holy, let us live to make men free, While God is marching on.	Glory, Glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

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### **Instructions:**

For this exercise, you will view a side-by-side video of two performances of “Battle Hymn of the Republic”: the one on the left is from Barack Obama’s inauguration (2013) and the one on the right is from George H. W. Bush’s funeral (2018). The musical groups performing at each event chose the same well-known arrangement of “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” While you are watching these videos, please respond to the below questions.

### **Questions:**

1. What makes the text of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” appropriate for both a time of mourning (funeral) and a time of celebration (inauguration)?

2. There are four moments in particular that stand out in Peter Wilhousky’s arrangement: the opening horn call, the hymn section (which begins with the text “in the beauty of the lilies”), the allusion to the tune “Dixie,” and the triumphant closing. What imagery and ideas do the sounds of the music evoke in these four moments?

Horn call:

Dixie allusion:

Hymn section:

Triumphant close:

3. How does “Battle Hymn of the Republic” construct specific visions of American identity in each of these performance contexts?

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### RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

#### Selected Arrangements of “Battle Hymn of the Republic”

Title	Composer/Arranger	Orchestration	Level	Publisher
Battle Hymn of the Republic	Peter Wilhousky, arr. and James Neilson	Concert Band	Medium	Carl Fischer
Battle Hymn of the Republic- P.O.P.	Carmen Dragon, arr.	Concert Band (with optional String Set)	Medium	Hal Leonard
United We Stand (Medley)	Sally Albrecht, arr., Jay Althouse, and John O'Reilly	Concert Band	Medium-Easy	Alfred Music
Battle Hymn of the Republic	William Steffe, arr. Peter Wilhousky	SSAATTBB; SSA; TTBB	Medium-Easy	Hal Leonard
A Patriotic Salute (Medley)	Linda Spevacek	SATB	Medium-Easy	Heritage Music
The Battle Hymn of the Republic	Lon Beery, arr.	SSA	Medium-Easy	Shawnee
Battle Hymn of the Republic	John Rutter	Full Orchestra	Medium	Oxford University
Point Lookout (A Fantasy on Civil War Songs)	Brian Balmages	String Orchestra	Master	FJH Music
Battle Hymn of the Republic	J. Simmons	Marching Band	Medium-Easy	Hal Leonard

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