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## Bring The Jubilee: The Civil War and the Healing Power of its Music

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# Bring the Jubilee:

THE CIVIL WAR AND THE HEALING POWER OF ITS MUSIC

BY RICHARD ELLIOTT MARTIN

On a cold November night in 1861, poet Julia Ward Howe suddenly had a stroke of inspiration while lying in bed in her room at the Willard Hotel in Washington. "I went to bed that night as usual, and slept, according to my wont, quite soundly," she wrote. "I awoke in the gray of the morning twilight; and as I lay waiting for the dawn, the long lines of the desired poem began to twine themselves in my mind. Having thought out all the stanzas, I said to myself, "I must get up and write these verses down, lest I fall asleep again and forget them." So, with a sudden effort, I sprang out of bed, and found in the dimness an old stump of a pencil which I remembered to have used the day before. I scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper."<sup>1</sup>The moment was poignant, yet it was also visceral and random. A regiment of Union soldiers from Massachusetts were marching past Howe's hotel room, and the men were singing the popular abolitionist song 'John Brown's Body.' Its tune and chorus struck Howe as timely, and it led her to pen one of the most popular and enduring songs of the day, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

"Battle Hymn" and other patriotic songs served many purposes, including sectionalism, war propaganda, campfire and home-front entertainment, connection with the Divine, and protest. It was sung on the march, on work details, around the campfire, in parlors, opera houses, and in some cases on the battlefield. There were bugle calls for everything from reveille in the mornings to taps at night, advance, retreat, sick calls, mail calls, roll calls, drill, mess, and more. Even today, music can help an individual understand his own world in ways few things can. However, to the men that wrote, sang, and performed music during the war and its aftermath, no form that it took was more significant than as an expression of their own thoughts and feelings

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<sup>1</sup> "Battle Hymn of the Republic," Wikipedia Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., updated April 9, 2021. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_Hymn\\_of\\_the\\_Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_Hymn_of_the_Republic)

To soldiers who survived the horrors of Civil War combat, and the monotony of camp life, invasion, rebellion, suffering, victory, and defeat, music was an effective way of processing their experiences.

Many songs from the Civil War have proven to be enduringly popular, but scholarship on the music of the time is less common than other aspects of wartime life. Still, in recent years scholars have begun to publish analyses on the overlooked subject. In his work, *Music and Musket: Bands and Bandsmen of the Civil War* (Greenwood Press, 1981), author Kenneth E. Olson discusses the lives and struggles of military musicians in the Union and Confederate armies, both in regimental brass bands and in camp. Early in the war, each Union regiment was equipped with a band of twenty-four musicians as part of its complement when it was mustered into service. This proved expensive, however, and after 1861 bands were organized at the brigade level.<sup>2</sup> Confederate bands were less common due to wartime shortages of instruments and trained musicians. In both armies, young men lied about their ages in-order-to enlist, both as infantrymen and as musicians. According to Olsen, the recruits had to audition for their roles. On page 84, the author cites an 1863 Federal regulation which allowed for

“such of the recruits as are found to possess a natural talent for music, to be instructed on the fife, bugle, and drum, and other military instruments, the boys of twelve years of age and upward [to be] enlisted for this purpose. But as recruits under eighteen years of age and undersized must be discharged, if they are not capable of learning music, care should be taken to enlist only those who have a natural talent for music.”<sup>3</sup>

The men had to earn their keep.

*Music and Musket* outlines the organization of bands, the pay scale, recruitment, training and workload of regimental bands in the Union army, as well as their uses. The book’s opening

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<sup>2</sup> Olsen, Kenneth E. *Music and Musket: Bands and Bandsmen of the Civil War*, Greenwood Press, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 84

chapter discusses music's role in prior conflicts, in particular the American Revolution. However, while this sets the stage for the rest of the book, it often leads the reader to wonder how any of it is relevant to the music of 1861-1865, which is supposed to be its focus. Irrelevance is a constant issue throughout the book, although it does give a broader overview of the centrality of music. The following chapter discusses the fall of Fort Sumter in 1861, but makes no mention of the role of music or military bands in this event.

Olsen's work is not without merit, however. One of the key arguments he makes is that music was a useful tool which political leaders both North and South were able to utilize to rally their nations for war. Whole towns responded to the call of duty early-on in the conflict, often with great fanfare. ““On 6 August [1861],” Olsen writes, “the bells rang all over Washington and a thirty-four-gun salute was fired. Businesses closed early. By 5:00pm a crowd of nearly ten thousand had gathered near the steps of the capitol to hear the serenade played by the Marine Band.”<sup>4</sup> This spectacle had a “cumulative effect... [which] whipped the crowd into a frenzy.”<sup>5</sup>

*Music and Musket* occasionally slips into redundancy, and at times can be a bit of an information dump. Its chapters read as though they were separate essays in themselves, rather than part of an overarching narrative, each including separate footnotes. But it is still a useful resource. The book's strength is its comprehensiveness, and its focus on the military musicians and aspects of music as distinct from civilian musicians and popular songwriters. Olsen frequently cites primary sources such as diaries written by the musicians, in which they discuss their day-to-day activities, and also gives the specific details and structure specifications for

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 59-60

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 60

regimental bands of the Union armies. Documentation of the same information for Confederate bands, on the other hand, is sparse.

Music had a higher function than merely structuring the soldiers' routines. In many ways, the simple act of listening to music was transformed by the war. In *Music on the Rapidan* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014), author James A. Davis analyzes the communal role of music in the armies throughout the winter encampment of 1863-1864, and how a soldier's perception of it was often a core part of his identity. Music, according to Davis, was a bonding experience that allowed the soldiers to relate to one another and make sense of their world and experiences. It takes as its premise that "music a particularly meaningful social process during the American Civil War and that the idea of community was central to Americans' worldview at this time."<sup>6</sup> This is true, however, not just for men under arms but for civilians as well. Davis devotes each chapter to a specific role that music played including its social, religious, military, and civilian functions, as well as how these roles related to each other as the armies camped in Culpeper and Orange counties.

*Music on the Rapidan* devotes little attention on the actual music itself, and at times Davis's prose can seem difficult to understand. Much of his writing is abstract, awkward, and cumbersome when a direct approach is warranted. But music as community is a bit of an abstract concept on its own. A more in-depth and specific case-by-case analysis of each chapter's theme could have explored such topics as the evolution of citizen-soldiers, or the function of music in religion and nationalism. There is also little mention of local slaves or of the portrayal of African-Americans as caricatures in popular minstrel acts.

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<sup>6</sup> Davis, James A. *Music on the Rapidan: Civil War Soldiers, Music, and Community During Winter Quarters, Virginia*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2014), p. 2.

Several chapters present the intriguing theme of music as class-distinction. In Chapter Four, entitled 'Military Balls and the Officers' Community,' Davis uses a lithograph of a social Ball published in *Harper's Weekly* to illustrate the upper classes' social customs and ballroom etiquette. Many officers of the Union and Confederate armies had matriculated at West Point and dance instruction had been mandatory for its cadets since 1829. "Cultured activities," Davis argues, "not only displayed the enlightened nature of the participants but also acted as a civilizing influence."<sup>7</sup> Taking this a step further, he later states "the aristocratic subcommunity reaffirmed their connection with each other through their superiority over those who were not part of their social sphere."<sup>8</sup> Chapters Two, Three, and Five discuss music of the lower classes, such as enlisted men and civilians. Davis presents popular songs as the favored form here, because of the bonding experience and their ability to offer the common man escape from the horrors of war.

*Music on the Rapidan* is at its strongest when it discusses the esoteric ways in which music can bring people together; its flaw is that it is vague and often utilizes awkward language and sentence structure. Its prose can seem detached at times, and the book would have benefitted from more discussion of the musicians and the music itself, instead of how it was utilized. In addition, Davis makes scant mention of the work of other scholars. But this is a work about community. While few historians have chosen to discuss music specifically during the winter encampment of 1863-64, *Music on the Rapidan* is groundbreaking as it offers a well-researched and nuanced look into a largely overlooked period.

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<sup>7</sup> Davis, James A. *Music*, page 116.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, p. 126.

Author Christian McWhirter's work, *Battle Hymns: The Power and Popularity of Music in the Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) takes a much broader view of the music of the 1860s. McWhirter's work demonstrates the many uses of music, from nationalistic propaganda to slave spirituals, from psychological comfort to twentieth-century American cultural debate over the legacy of the war. In his introduction, McWhirter asserts that "[music] provided a valuable way for Americans to express their thoughts and feelings about the conflict. Conversely, songs shaped the thoughts and feelings of civilians, soldiers, and slaves – shaping how they viewed the war."<sup>9</sup> The author's goal is to go beyond mere analysis of the music or biographies of musicians to show the way it was used, and, in a sense, how nineteenth-century Americans related to music and the world around them.

*Battle Hymns* is arranged topically, with each chapter focusing on songs of one side or the other, from popular songs of the day, to patriotic songs of North and South, to songs of the home front, African American music, and lastly, the legacies of both the war and its music in the twentieth century and beyond. According to McWhirter, music- more specifically, popular songs, was an effective tool for promoting ideologies. Abolitionists and their rivals, as well as temperance advocates, politicians and the military were quick to grasp this. Chapter One explores various examples of how this was realized and utilized, from concert stages to hospital wards by musicians and others who were willing to experiment with sounds. Subsequent chapters discuss the music of the respective sides separately, as well as the home front, and the book ends with a discussion of the war's legacy. *Battle Hymns* is written in a way that is easy to

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<sup>9</sup> McWhirter, Christian. *Battle Hymns: The Power and Popularity of Music in the Civil War*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2012).



understand, and the systematic method by which it examines each topic separately supports its argument nicely.

Musicians cannot always plan or predict the impact that their music is going to have. As McWhirter demonstrates with his discussion of the search for a national anthem, it is the unplanned elements, and the raw emotions that they elicit, which reach people and which give a piece of music its power and greatest effect upon the listener. When an author or songwriter “tries” too hard to get his message across, he will fail. Memorable popular music is spontaneous and free, born of the true passions of the moment in which it is written, rather than an attempt to simply sound good. This is the essence of *Battle Hymns*, and it is effective. McWhirter posits that the most memorable pieces are the ones which are not trying to understand from someone else’s point of view, but rather encapsulate the author’s own. These are the pieces which most effectively resonate and find a lasting audience. This is not something which an artist, whether of songwriting, prose, poetry, otherwise can plan; its magic is in its spontaneity.

Like modern-day Americans, music consumers of the nineteenth century had several genres to choose from. Patriotic songs could engage its audiences’ emotions, bonding them to their countries and rallying them to their nations’ aid in times of crisis. While the United States had no national anthem until 1931, when such music was called for military and civilian bands frequently played such tunes as “Hail, Columbia,” “Yankee Doodle,” “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thee.” After the bombardment of Fort Sumter in 1861, a wave of patriotism swept the United States, and a committee of songwriters formed in New York sought to challenge patriotic citizens to pen an official American anthem. The committee, comprised of thirteen prominent members, offered a \$500 prize for the winning song, which was to be submitted to Congress for adoption consideration. It is worth noting that, despite receiving

over one thousand entries, the committee declared that no entry was worthy of submission and no prize would be awarded.<sup>10</sup>

Music had other traditional uses as well, such as psalms and hymns which served to augment religious services. Religious music included hymns such as “Rock of Ages,” “Nearer My God to Thee,” and the ever-popular “Amazing Grace.” Classical and operatic songs could be heard in orchestras and opera houses. Professional minstrel shows toured the country, and glee clubs were a popular pastime in the camps of many Union and Confederate regiments. But perhaps no form of music was nearer and dearer to the hearts of Americans North and South than popular songs about everyday life. The sentimental impact of music had been known to musicians and writers for millennia and this was not lost on songwriters of the mid-nineteenth century.

Patriotic popular music appeared almost as soon as the war began. Popular songwriter George Frederick Root, part-owner of the Chicago based music publishing firm Root & Cady, wrote “The First Gun is Fired!” and published it in April 1861, mere days after the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor.<sup>11</sup> The song’s lyrics reflect the charged atmosphere and patriotism that was sweeping through the North and South at the time. The first verse began:

The first gun is fired!  
 may God protect the right!  
 Let the free-born sons of the North arise  
 in power's avenging might  
 Shall the glorious Union our fathers made  
 by ruthless hands be sundered?  
 And we of freedom's sacred right  
 by trait'rous foes be plundered

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<sup>10</sup> McWhirter, *Battle Hymns*, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Root, George Frederick, *The Story of a Musical Life*, (AMS Press, New York, 1891). (memoir) (born 8/30/1820-d. 1895).

Beseeching its audience to fight for the Union cause, Root's song included the chorus

Arise; Arise; Arise!  
And gird ye for the fight,  
And let our watchword ever be,  
May God protect the right.<sup>12</sup>

Though much of his wartime music was patriotic or propagandistic, Root strove to write simple songs from the perspective of the individual soldier. Forty-one years old at the start of the war and lacking both military experience and formal musical training, Root played several instruments and was a celebrated songwriter by 1861. His 1862 song 'Just Before the Battle, Mother' was written as an attempt to summarize Union soldiers' thoughts. In his autobiography, *The Story of a Musical Life*, published in 1891, Root wrote that the popularity of his song 'The Battle Cry of Freedom' made him proud to have penned it. Upon its publication, he wrote, "[the song] went into the army, and the testimony in regard to its use in camp and on the march, and even on the field of battle, from soldiers up to generals, and even to the good President himself, made me thankful that if I could not shoulder a musket in defense of my country I could serve her in this way."<sup>13</sup> Root & Cady was the employer of another successful songwriter, Henry Clay Work, author of the popular songs "Kingdom Comin'," which addressed the war from the perspective of a 'contraband' slave, and "Marching Through Georgia," a postwar song about Union Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's triumphant and destructive 'March to the Sea' in 1864.<sup>14</sup> The latter song was used extensively at veterans' reunions and monument dedications in the late nineteenth century.

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<sup>12</sup> George Frederick Root, "The First Gun is Fired!" lyrics by George F. Root (Root & Cady, 1861)

<sup>13</sup> Root, George Frederick, *The Story of a Musical Life*, (AMS Press, New York, 1891). (memoir) (born 8/30/1820-d. 1895).

<sup>14</sup> In May 1861, Union Major General Benjamin F. Butler declared that escaped slaves who made their way to his lines at Fortress Monroe on the Virginia Peninsula would be treated as 'contraband of war' rather than as private

Southern musicians and songwriters were no less ardent in their patriotism for their cause. The most popular Confederate song of the war was ‘Dixie,’ published by Ohioan Daniel Decatur Emmett in 1859, two years prior to the war. Originally intended for traveling minstrel shows, Emmett’s song immediately lent its name to the region with which it is associated most closely. Relatively unknown before the war, ‘Dixie’s lyrics included not a rousing call to arms as its northern counterparts had; rather, it represented an appeal to the southern homeland, a romantic way of life which many Confederate soldiers had enlisted to defend. “‘Dixie,’” writes Christian McWhirter in his work *Battle Hymns*, “comforted Confederate soldiers by assuring them that they were fighting for their homes and that slavery was a benign institution.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the second most popular southern song, “The Bonnie Blue Flag” by Harry McCarthy, addressed secession and Southern nationalism directly, calling out the slaveholding states in the order in which they seceded while making appeals to fraternity:

We are a band of brothers, and native to the soil,  
 fighting for our liberty we gained through honest toil  
 And when our rights were threatened, the cry rose near and far,  
 Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single Star!

Chorus  
 Hurrah! Hurrah! For southern rights hurrah!  
 Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single Star!

As long as the Union was faithful to her trust  
 like friends and like brethren kind we were and just  
 But now when northern treachery attempts our rights to mar  
 We hoist on high the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single Star!<sup>16</sup>

Many songs were loved by citizens of both the Union and the Confederacy. In addition to “The First Gun is Fired!” George Frederick Root was also the author of “The Battle Cry of

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property to be returned to their owners. In time, this became official U.S. Army policy. ‘Contraband’ thus became a term which referred to successful escapees.

<sup>15</sup> McWhirter, Christian. *Battle Hymns*, p.126.

<sup>16</sup> Harry McCarthy, “The Bonnie Blue Flag,” 1861

Freedom,” one of the war’s most popular and enduring songs. Published in 1862, “Battle Cry” was soon being sung by civilians on the home front and by soldiers in both the Northern and Southern armies. Its chorus is familiar as it exhorts the listener to take immediate action with the refrain:

The Union forever! Hurrah boys, hurrah!  
 Down with the traitor, up with the Star!  
 While we Rally ‘Round the Flag, boys, we’ll rally once again,  
 Shouting the Battle cry of Freedom!<sup>17</sup>

Not to be outdone, southerners responded with their own version, which included the refrain:

Our Dixie forever! She’s never at a loss,  
 Down with the eagle, up with the cross,  
 While we rally round the Bonnie flag, we’ll rally once again,  
 Shout, shout, the battle cry of freedom!

The downside of music as propaganda became apparent to both sides as the war progressed, and commanders on both sides took steps to prevent its use by the enemy. The Confederate song ‘Maryland, My Maryland’ was written to incite that state to secede, which it did not. In Baltimore on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863, Union Major General R. C. Schenck, Provost Marshal of the Eighth Army Corps, declared that the sale of ‘Maryland, My Maryland,’ and other “secession music” was “an evil, incendiary,” and “not for the public good.”<sup>18</sup> Local music publishers were instructed to “hereby discontinue such sales until further orders. Also, to send to this office any such music you may have on hand at present.”<sup>19</sup> *The Monmouth Herald and Inquirer*, of Monmouth, New Jersey, wrote that after Schenck’s order “three of the prominent music publishers [in Baltimore] were arrested, made to give up their Confederate music and

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<sup>17</sup> George Frederick Root, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, lyrics by George Frederick Root (Root & Cady, 1862).

<sup>18</sup> 29th New Jersey “A.S.C.” “On Being a Soldier—Misconceptions,” *The Monmouth (NJ) Herald and Inquirer*, (Freehold, NJ), 26th Feb. 1863, Page 1

<sup>19</sup> 29th New Jersey “A.S.C.” “On Being a Soldier—Misconceptions,” *The Monmouth (NJ) Herald and Inquirer* (Freehold, NJ), 26th Feb. 1863, Page 1

ascribe to the following parole: ‘We hereby give our honor and pledge ourselves solemnly to discontinue the publication or sale of music which, in its words, encourage, sympathize, or commend the section of the southern states now in rebellion.’ All ‘confederate’ music was thereby confiscated and banned in Baltimore.<sup>20</sup>

But death and carnage are just as much a part of war as patriotism, and after the First Battle of Bull Run (referred to as Manassas by the Confederates) in July 1861, each side began to realize that a long and bloody fight lay ahead. As the war dragged on, songs began to reflect this change in mood. In addition to ‘The Battle Cry of Freedom’ George Root was also the author of the 1861 song ‘The Vacant Chair,’ in which he summarizes the emotions felt by civilians on the home front as their young men marched off to war. Postulating on a loved one’s death in battle, Root set to music a recent poem about a young family who had recently lost a son who had enlisted in the Union army. Their despair is overtly stated in the lyrics:

We shall meet, but we shall miss him there will be one vacant chair,  
We shall linger to caress him, while we breathe our evening prayer  
When a year ago we gathered, joy was in his mild blue eye  
But a golden cord is severed, and our hopes in ruin lie.

Chorus

We shall meet, but we shall miss him, there will be one vacant chair  
We shall linger to caress him, while we breathe our evening prayer

At our fireside, sad and lonely, often will the bosom swell  
At remembrance of the story how our noble Willie fell  
How he strove to bear our banner through the thickest of the fight  
And upheld our country’s honor in the strength of manhood’s might  
Chorus<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, “Sale of Southern Music,” April 7th, 1863.

<sup>21</sup> George Frederick Root, *The Vacant Chair*, lyrics by Henry Washburn (Root & Cady, Chicago, IL 1861). Washburn was visiting a family of a Lieutenant who had been killed in the Battle of Ball’s Bluff. After Washburn wrote the lyrics, the popular composer of many Civil War musical works, George Root wrote music to accompany them. The song lyrics create the image of a family sitting around their table with one vacant chair for their fallen soldier. The powerful imagery that the song lyrics inspire is perhaps one of the reasons the song became a very popular funeral song for veterans.  
<https://petersonhist127.weebly.com/the-vacant-chair.html>

Correspondingly, some officers noticed a drop in morale, and took steps to ban certain songs from being played.

Just as civilians longed for the safe return of their loved ones in uniform, so the soldiers longed to return home. By 1863, songs of homecoming were the leading trend in publication. Another of the war's most enduringly popular melodies, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," by Patrick Gilmore of Massachusetts, published September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1863, addressed this subject directly. The song, which borrowed its melody from the popular Irish drinking song "Johnny Fill Up Your Bowl," described a parade of triumphant soldiers returning home to a jubilant reception:<sup>22</sup>

When Johnny comes marching home again, hurrah! Hurrah!  
 We'll give him a hearty welcome, then, hurrah! Hurrah!  
 Oh, the men will cheer and the boys will shout,  
 and the ladies, they will all turn out,  
 And we'll all feel gay when Johnny comes marching home!

1862 saw the publication of Walter Kittridge's "Tenting On The Old Camp Ground," which was sung around the campfire by the men of the Northern armies, fighting far from home. Its first verse imagined a pleasant return to normalcy. But its morose final verse included the lyrics:

We are tired of war on the old campground,  
 many are dead and gone.  
 Of the brave and the true who've left their homes,  
 others been wounded long.

refrain  
 Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,  
 wishing for the war to cease,  
 Many are the hearts that are looking for the right  
 to see the dawn of peace.  
 Dying tonight, dying tonight,  
 Dying on the old campground.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cornelius, Stephen H., *American History Through Music*, (Greenwood Press, 2004) p. 69-70.

<sup>23</sup> Cornelius, *American History*, p. 59.

In addition to “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” Patrick Gilmore set to music a version of the 1862 poem, “We Are Coming, Father Abraham,” which was written in response to President Abraham Lincoln’s call for volunteers. Two years later, L.O. Emerson of Boston-based publisher Oliver Ditson & Co. published the most popular version of the song under the title “We Are Coming, Father Abraham, Three Hundred Thousand More.” The two versions sold more than two million combined printed copies of their sheet music by the end of the war.

As the war progressed and the casualties mounted, many soldiers began to lament the possibility of their own wounding, death, and need for psychological comfort. Some soldiers took up the pen and indulged in composing their own music and poetry, which often reflected the mindset through which they viewed the war and its hardships. New York songwriter Charles Carroll Sawyer was not a soldier, but published several songs sung from an infantryman’s perspective as an attempt to understand their mindset, including his most well-known song, “Weeping, Sad, and Lonely, or When This Cruel War Is Over.”<sup>24</sup> Sawyer prefaced the lyrics to his song ‘Mother Would Comfort Me’ (1863) with the following inscription:

“Mother Would Comfort Me” by Charles Carroll Sawyer. “Note- a soldier in one of the New York regiments, after being severely wounded, was taken prisoner; and after lying in the hospital for a number of days he was told by those who were in attendance that “they could do no more for him,” that he must die. For a few moments the poor fellow seemed in deep thought; reviving a little, he turned slowly toward them, and after thanking them for the kind manner in which they had treated him during his sickness, a sweet smile passed over his pale face, and with a firm voice he said, “MOTHER WOULD COMFORT ME, IF SHE WERE HERE.” Those were his last words.”<sup>25</sup>

Confederate soldier and poet Lamar Fontaine was one of several individuals who claimed authorship of the popular Southern song ‘All Quiet Along The Potomac Tonight’ which deals in

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<sup>24</sup> Cornelius, *American History*, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> [https://imslp.org/wiki/Mother\\_Would\\_Comfort\\_Me\\_\(Sawyer,\\_Charles\\_Carroll\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Mother_Would_Comfort_Me_(Sawyer,_Charles_Carroll))



detail with the shooting of a picket of unclear national loyalty. Fontaine's account of his authorship is likely a fabrication as the lyrics were also claimed by a Mrs. Ethel Lynn Beers of Philadelphia under a different title.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the song soon became popular among Confederate soldiers.

Battle and death are a small part of war, however. Most of a soldier's time is spent in camp, drilling, preparing to fight, and wiling away the time. Brass bands were always a popular form of entertainment when there was nothing going on. As Kenneth E. Olsen noted in *Music and Musket*, early in the war each Union regiment was outfitted with a band, but after a year of war bands were implemented at the brigade level. While music served as a useful tool for entertainment, propaganda, and morale, during battle, bandsmen assisted the surgeons by acting as stretcher bearers and hospital attendants. The band of the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry included Moravian musicians from the town of Salem, North Carolina. One of the largest bands on either side of the war, the 26<sup>th</sup> had a large repertoire, including marches, waltzes, quicksteps, patriotic airs, religious hymns, and some popular songs of the day, as well as original compositions.<sup>27</sup>

Large concentrations of troops in close quarters often led to planned social events such as officer's balls and informal concerts. In this vein, the winter of 1862-1863 saw two musical events which soon became legendary. An April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1863 letter published in *The Abingdon Virginian* tells us that "the Federals... have some capital bands within their ranks. Recently, one of these organizations came down to the riverside opposite Fredericksburg, and favored our boys (who had gathered in large numbers to listen) with a variety of popular pieces in the best style.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://archive.org/details/cu31924021985084>

<sup>27</sup> Moravian Music Foundation, *Music from the 26<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Regimental Band from the Civil War*, 2002 © 2002 Recorded Anthology of American Music, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

Applause from the audience on each side followed. The band then struck up ‘Dixie’ and executed in a creditable manner. At its conclusion, our soldiers sent up such a shout as made the welkin ring. This was followed by ‘Yankee Doodle,’ when a burst of applause from the Federals followed. Then the band played ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ which all could feel and appreciate, and when it was finished such a shout went up from both armies as I doubt has ever been heard on Earth.”<sup>28</sup> An 1888 account published in *The Winchester News* claims that “as the last note died away in the distance once vast shout of approval from two-hundred thousand veterans on both sides of the Rappahannock ascended heavenward.”<sup>29</sup> It is as though the healing power of music swept through both Union and Confederate soldiers alike and for one moment united them.

The other event was just as remarkable. On the night of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1862, at Stone’s River near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, the Union and Confederate armies bivouacked within sight of one another, aware that a great battle was to be fought in the morning. History does not record which army’s bands began playing first, but soon those of both sides engaged in an impromptu band competition, each side alternating songs, to the delight of the cold, hungry soldiers. Similar to Fredericksburg, Northern bands played “Yankee Doodle” and “Hail Columbia.” But they were answered by Southern bands playing ‘Dixie’ and ‘The Bonnie Blue Flag.’ The event concluded with both bands simultaneously performing ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ to which thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers added their voices. Three days later, after one of the bloodiest battles of the war, twenty-three thousand troops would be dead or wounded.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *The Abingdon Virginian*, “An Incident on the Rappahannock,” Fri, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1863.”

<sup>29</sup>*The Winchester News*, “A Reminiscence of That Bloody Field- The Night Before the Battle,” June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1888.

<sup>30</sup> “Battle of Stones River,” Wikipedia Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., updated April 11, 2021. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Stones\\_River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Stones_River)

One of the most popular venues for music performance on the civilian front was the parlor, and many private nineteenth-century homes included a piano or keyboard for both aesthetic and recreational purposes. Music was an active medium in the mid-nineteenth century; when people were fortunate enough to listen to it, they paid it due attention, and participated in it by dancing, singing along, or just following along, allowing themselves to feel the bond between performer and listener. Women were often the favorite singers. “There is nothing more refining than good music,” the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* wrote in 1862, “and no music more touching than the voice of woman, that steals o’er the senses like the tone of flutes upon the waters. The truth of this is so obvious, that even the drama is considered incomplete without the presence of some daughter of song, who may by her thrilling notes excite the softer emotions of the multitude, and instil into the mind, disturbed by outward turmoil, the soothing recollections of other and happier days.”<sup>31</sup>

The end of the war in 1865 brought both happier days for Union soldiers and less happy days for their Confederate counterparts, and postwar music often reflects this. One of the most popular postwar Union songs was Henry Clay Work’s “Marching Through Georgia” (1865) with its triumphant description of Major General William Tecumseh Sherman’s famous march to the sea. Its lyrics were sung by soldiers eager to reminisce on the ‘liberal’ foraging parties, lax discipline, and the destructiveness of the march. The chorus introduced the phrase, ‘bring the jubilee,’ which would enter the nineteenth-century lexicon meaning happy, celebrant, jubilant.

Bring the good old bugle, boys, we’ll sing another song  
 sing it with the spirit that will start the world along  
 Sing it as we used to sing it fifty thousand strong,  
 While we were Marching Through Georgia!

refrain

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<sup>31</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, May 6th, 1862.

Hurrah! Hurrah! We bring the Jubilee!  
 Hurrah! Hurrah! The flag that makes you free!  
 So we sang the chorus from Atlanta to the sea,  
 While we were Marching Through Georgia!

“Sherman’s dashing Yankee boys will never reach the coast,”  
 So the saucy rebels said and ‘twas a handsome boast,  
 Had they not forgot, alas! To reckon with the host,  
 While we were Marching Through Georgia!

refrain

So we made a thoroughfare for freedom and her train,  
 sixty miles in latitude, three hundred to the main,  
 Treason fled before us, for resistance was in vain,  
 While we were Marching Through Georgia!

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refrain<sup>32</sup>

According to George Frederick Root, “[Work],” his employee at Root & Cady, “was a slow, pains-taking writer, being from one to three weeks upon a song, but when the work was done it was like a piece of fine mosaic, especially in the fitting of words to music. His ‘Marching Thro’ Georgia’ is more played and sung at the present time than any other song of the war.”<sup>33</sup>

“Marching Through Georgia” was used extensively at postwar veterans’ reunions well into the twentieth century. Its popularity followed its subject’s fame; though he disliked the song, Sherman often endured it at speaking engagements. As a final irony, the song was played at Sherman’s funeral in 1891.

Confederates mourned and vindicated their defeat through song just as their Union comrades had celebrated in victory. One of the most popular postwar southern songs was “I’m a Good Ol’ Rebel,” which spoke of southern pride and a refusal to be reconstructed with the lines,

Refrain

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<sup>32</sup> Work, Henry C. (Henry Clay) -- 1832-1884 (composer) “Marching Through Georgia,” (S. Brainard's Sons, Cleveland, OH) 1865.

<sup>33</sup> Root, George F. *Story*, p. 138.

I'm a Good Ol' Rebel, now that's just what I am  
 For that yankee nation, I do not give a damn,  
 I'm glad I fought agin 'er, I only wish we won,  
 I ain't asked any pardon for anything I done.

verse

Three hundred thousand yankees are stiff in Southern dust  
 We got three hundred thousand before they conquered us.  
 They died of Southern fever and Southern steel and shot,  
 Wish it was three million instead of what we got.

Written in 1867, "I'm a Good Ol' Rebel" became an anthem of the Reconstruction era, white southern resistance, and writers of the late-nineteenth century "Lost Cause" literary and philosophical movement.<sup>34</sup> Its lyrics suggested that the Confederate cause was chivalrous, and that the way for the south to move forward after the war was to justify and hold on to their rancor and bitterness, but no longer participate in military resistance. In this way, pride, memory, traditions, valor, and, perhaps more importantly, racial order in a post-slavery society, could be maintained.

The prevalence and popularity of music in 1860s America indicates that it was an effective source of relief for soldiers and civilians. From home parlors to battlefields, political rallies to string band concerts, from Fort Sumter to Appomattox and beyond, music was performed for all occasions. Music publishing became a lucrative industry because of the war. Institutions such as patriotism and the nature of slavery and freedom were often explored in song lyrics. Americans wrote about their innermost thoughts and feelings, putting down on paper and in print what was hard to say aloud. They wrote about love, loss, life, death, home, God, country, and everything in between. For nineteenth-century Americans living in an age before

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph M. Thompson, "I Won't Be Reconstructed: Good Old Rebels, Civil War Memory, and Popular Song," master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 2013.

psychology, music became a communal experience in which difficult emotions over shared wartime experiences were processed, expressed, and celebrated.

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