

Ooh! Ah! Sis-Boom-Bah!

Some Music to Go with the Fireworks on the Fourth of July

Welcome to This Is America, with VOA Learning English.

America's Declaration of Independence from Britain was signed on July 4, 1776. Today, Mary Tillotson and Steve Ember bring you an Independence Day program of songs that celebrate America.

Americans celebrate the Fourth of July with family gatherings, parades, speeches and fireworks. They also celebrate with patriotic music.

The official song of the United States is "The Star-Spangled Banner." Francis Scott Key wrote the words in 1814. At that time, America and Britain were at war. Francis Scott Key watched as British forces attacked Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland. Through the smoke and fire, he could see a huge American flag flying over the army base.

The next morning, after the battle, he looked to see which flag flew over Fort McHenry. It would tell which side had won. Key saw that the American flag still flew. He wrote a poem re-creating the event. Soon after, music was added to his words. The United States Congress made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the national song in 1931.

Americans sing it at the beginning of many public meetings and sports events. Here is America's national song, performed by Faith Hill.

Some people say "The Star-Spangled Banner" is difficult to sing. Others do not like the words. Some people have suggested that the United States change its national song. They say many other songs that celebrate America would be better.

One of these is called "America." It is also known as "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Samuel Smith wrote it in 1832. The music is the same as the British national song, "God Save the Queen." The Southwestern Christian College Chorus sings "America."

Some people think "America the Beautiful" is one of the best songs that celebrates America. Katherine Lee Bates wrote the words in 1893. Samuel Ward wrote the music. Many singers and groups have recorded "America the Beautiful." Ray Charles sings his version.

Many people think "God Bless America" is the best song that celebrates America. Irving Berlin wrote it in 1917. It became popular twenty years later when Kate Smith sang it on a national radio broadcast. Listen now to the young voices of the American Boychoir as they perform "God Bless America."

Other people would like America's national song to be "This Land Is Your Land." Woody Guthrie wrote the words in 1940. It became one of the most popular folk songs in America. Pete Seeger and the Weavers sing "This Land Is Your Land."

Years ago, Lee Greenwood recorded a song called "God Bless the U.S.A." This song has gained new meaning and popularity since the terrorist attacks on the United States, September 11, 2001. Listen as Lee Greenwood sings "God Bless the U.S.A."

This program was written by Jerilyn Watson and produced by Caty Weaver. Mary Tillotson and Steve Ember were your announcers. Join us again next week for another report about life in the United States with the VOA Learning English program This Is America.