

National Anthems

58. U.S.A. (Traditional)

The Star-Spangled Banner

John Stafford Smith

(1750-1836)

arr. William Melton

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(The Anacreontic Song, 1799)

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Smith, John Stafford

(baptised 30 March 1750 in Gloucester; died 21 September 1836 in London)

Smith studied with his father, the organist of Gloucester Cathedral, and also with William Boyce. He was named a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1784, and in 1802 became organist there, also conducting the Boys Choir after 1805. Though a lay vicar at Westminster Abbey, Smith had a less spiritual reputation as the composer of catches and glees that were highly regarded in pub and coffee house gatherings. In fact, his interest in all types of music was intense—he was editor of *Musica antiqua*, a two volume compendium of music from seven centuries, was an early collector of Bach manuscripts, and he prepared modern transcriptions of old music for Sir John Hawkins' famous *History*.

'The Anacreontic Song, as Sung at the Crown & Anchor Tavern in the Strand' was published by A. Bland's Music Warehouse about 1790. The six verses of ribaldry and classical allusion were penned by Anacreontic Society president Ralph Tomlinson and set to music by Smith. The song became the official anthem of the Society, and was reprinted in various forms including Smith's *Fifth Book of Canzonets, Catches, Canons & Glees Sprightly and Plaintive* in 1799 as well as versions for guitar and German flute. The melody was still popular in 1814 when Baltimore lawyer Francis Scott Key used it as a

scaffold for his patriotic poem about the defense of Fort McHenry. Though prevalent in band arrangements throughout the nineteenth century, 'The Star Spangled Banner' did not become the official anthem of the United States until 3 March 1931.

Two quartet versions of Smith's piece are offered in this collection. The first (No. 58) incorporates traditional changes in melody and rhythm that have evolved over two centuries of performance practice. The second version (No. 59) is based on the Library of Congress copy of the original 1790 publication (Call No.: M1630.3.S68 [Case]), in which the period style shines through—and the elegant 6/4 dance rhythms and natural fourth degree had not yet been ironed out.

Text by William Melton