

WITH ONE VOICE: The American Musical Experience of World War I

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AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC OF THE WAR

As clouds of war darkened the horizon in 1914, music expressed the nation's fears, hopes, and prayers. Never before had an event in American history sparked such an explosion of musical production. More than 35,000 copyrighted musical works document the conflict, lending credence to American composer Irving Berlin's claim that "the history of America could be traced through its music." The history of World War I is told in the thousands of songs that accompanied the fighting. The titles, lyrics, and sheet music cover images highlight the American experience of the war from both civilian and combatant perspectives, revealing how the nation came to join as one voice with a singular goal: victory.

The war dominated cultural output and was featured as a theme in literary, film, and visual arts, but it is music that perhaps most vividly conveys the spirit of the country as it approached the war. In an age before radio, television, or the internet, music was the most far-reaching mass media entertainment form available. The sound of amateur music-making filled American homes, and piano manufacturers built a record 323,000 pianos each year by 1914. Piano bench music libraries in homes across the country overflowed with war-inspired sheet music. Sheet music publishers from New York to Kansas City clamored to quench the nation's thirst for songs of war, producing at least 7,300 popular songs that were overtly related to the subject. War music flooded

the market, as plentiful as the war posters that plastered the streets of American cities. Recordings were also growing in popularity with the production of more than 500,000 phonographs (nick-named "talking machines") each year. More than 200 war songs were recorded and distributed by companies like Edison, Victor, or Columbia. Music was a creative outlet for citizens, but songs took on a serious role during the war. Recruitment songs like "Johnny, Get Your Gun and be a Soldier" helped swell the military ranks, and songs like "Let's All Be Americans Now," featuring a soldier in uniform on the sheet music cover, unified public opinion in favor of the war. John Philip Sousa, who wrote several war-themed works and was an early supporter of American participation in the conflict, understood music's power to move citizens and proclaimed, "Lecture me, write editorials at me, and I may be convinced that preparedness is necessary, but sing me a song that contains your message and I WILL BE won over at once!"

New York's Tin-Pan Alley and smaller music publishers in cities like Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston, or St. Louis were not the only sources for music of the war. Broadway shows and musical revues also adopted war themes with titles like *Over the Top*. Early jazz musicians like James Reece Europe brought strains of ragtime to war-torn Europe as part of the famous "Hellfighters" Jazz Band of the 369th Infantry Regiment of the 93rd Division of the U.S. Army, beloved by the troops for playing them music that reminded them of

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home. Religious hymns such as “Onward, Christian Soldiers” were enlisted to support the war. Protestant hymns were commonly included in pocket songbooks for soldiers alongside more patriotic standbys such as “America the Beautiful,” ideal for military sing-alongs or marches because they were familiar and easy to sing. John Philip Sousa and other band leaders wrote and performed feisty military marches they hoped would spur the nation on to success. Classical music was also affected as composers explored war themes in their works—Charles Ives was among many to compose a song to the famous John McCrae poem, “In Flanders Fields,” and his colleague Horatio Parker wrote an extended work for chorus and band in favor of the war, titled *An Allegory of War and Peace*. Several American orchestras downplayed or dropped Germanic pieces from concert programs and began opening or closing concerts with performances of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The Metropolitan Opera Company completely avoided German operas after the United States entered the war in a display of patriotism. Excitement for the war reached a fever pitch within the musical fabric of the country, infiltrating popular and classical genres alike.

For Americans at home during the war, singing was a means of actively expressing patriotism in private and public settings. Joining voices around a piano at home or singing along to a recording of world famous opera singer Enrico Caruso’s rendition of “Over There” bolstered morale and helped people feel connected to the soldiers who had left them behind. A bulletin for the Four-Minute Men encouraged four-minute singing as an alternative to speeches, boasting, “The Singing Army, whether it be a fighting army or a working army, cannot be beaten.” These men led public sing-alongs for movie theater audiences before showings of pro-war movies such as 1918’s *Pershing’s Crusaders*. Sing-alongs were also used to energize Liberty Bond rallies and other public gatherings. Classical concerts were peppered with nationalistic tunes, and it became nearly impossible to attend a musical event without encountering war music of one kind or another. Music bound the nation together in support of the war, critical to building and maintaining energy for the continued sacrifices the war would entail.

Music of the war echoed in the trenches with the help of portable wind-up gramophones, a small comfort to those who were facing the most desperate of circumstances. The British company Decca created a “Trench Model” gramophone that was specifically marketed to soldiers on the front. Live music was also available to troops thanks the help of more than



“Over There” Sheet Music Cover - Illustrated by Norman Rockwell

35,000 volunteers for the YMCA. In addition to plays, lectures, and movies, the YMCA organized performances by musical groups like the “Y Minstrels,” “Just Girls,” or the “Scrap Iron Jazz Band.” Song leaders led soldier sing-alongs with the help of mini songbooks that included lyrics to some of the most popular songs of the war. The YMCA officially trained song leaders for the Navy, Army, and Marines, who were well aware of the critical role music played in helping soldiers deal with the stress of combat. A song leader training pamphlet titled *National Repertoire of Required Songs* presented a variety of patriotic, folk, and popular marching songs, admonishing song leaders, “Remember, the importance of singing on the march cannot be over-estimated. It means more miles with less fatigue, good cheer instead of grouch.” Military bandleaders, many of whom had been trained by John Philip Sousa at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, also “did their bit” to help ease the monotony of marches. Doughboys experienced no shortage of music during the war, often inserting alternative lyrics to favorite tunes in order to lighten the mood. Music helped servicemen battle homesickness, exhaustion, and depression, a critical tool in the soldier’s arsenal.

FROM "I DIDN'T RAISE MY BOY TO BE A SOLDIER" TO "OVER THERE"

America stood at a crossroads as the war in Europe intensified: was it better to maintain peace, as Wilson had campaigned, or join the Allied fight? Music joined the debate with songs that alternately argued for isolationism or preparedness. Consider the following list of song titles advocating for continued neutrality: "Let us Have Peace;" "We Stand for Peace While Others War;" "(Whether Friend or Foe, They're Brothers) When They're Dreaming of Home Sweet Home;" and "If They Want to Fight, Alright, but Neutral is my Middle Name." The most popular of the anti-war songs linked motherhood and pacifism: "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." Selling over 700,000 copies in just eight weeks, the song was a smash hit. Its chorus encouraged nations to "arbitrate their future troubles" while asserting, "There'd be no war today if mothers all would say / I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier." The song was so popular that it would become a liability when public opinion shifted in favor of the war. How could patriotic composers hope to erase the pacifist messages that had been so firmly entrenched by the lyrics of "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier?"

With the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, Americans began to question the policy of neutrality as composers marked the tragedy with songs like "When the Lusitania Went Down" and "Lusitania Memorial Hymn." Music now urged citizens to "Wake Up, America!" and songs like "Fight for the American Flag" gained traction with the public. The tide turned with the help of songs that overtly challenged the pacifist message of "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier," including hits like "America, Here's My Boy," or "If I Had a Son for Each Star in Old Glory, Uncle Sam, I'd Give Them All to You," and direct rebuttals such as "I Raised My Boy to Be a Soldier," "I'd Be Proud to Be the Mother of a Soldier," and "It's Time for Every Boy to Be a Soldier." Colorful parodies of "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" also tried to diffuse the power of the original tune with creative titles like "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Slacker," "I Did Not Raise My Boy to Be a Coward," "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier, but I'll Send My Daughter to Be a Nurse," "What if George Washington's Mother had said, 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier?'" or even "I Didn't Raise My Dog to Be a Sausage" and "I Didn't Raise My Ford to Be a Jitney." Victrola officially withdrew the recording of "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" in April of 1917, the same month

the United States entered the war, and the success of George M. Cohan's defining war anthem, "Over There," cemented the nation's resolve to fight. Soon the youngest generation of Americans would be singing, "Goodbye Broadway, Hello France."

MUSIC AS AMMUNITION

The famous General John J. Pershing once remarked, "Music is as necessary to the boys as sleep and food." Major General Leonard Wood, who trained soldiers at Camp Funston, shared a similar philosophy and claimed, "It is just as essential that a soldier know how to sing as that he should carry rifles and know how to shoot them." Music was valued as a military asset, potent ammunition in the battle to uphold morale that was at least as important as the battle to defeat the Central Powers. As such, the military invested in musical leadership that was critical to the Allied victory. The Army, for example, trained song leaders who fought the tedium of marching with a string of popular war song choruses. A training book for song leaders offered the following practical advice:

"Enthusiasm is absolutely essential to success in song leading. Equally important is that the song leader shall absolutely know the words and music of everything he is trying to put across. To start a song successfully there are two essentials:

1. *Start in the right key*
2. *Have the men begin together*

The first beat of each bar must be absolutely clear and distinct. Many variations to lend novelty and variety for singing on the march are available: whistling, solos, solo squads, dividing of companies into sections and rotating the repeated choruses. But best of all is to arrange medleys of popular choruses all sung in the same key."

Never before had the Army so deliberately involved music in the war effort. Song books were prepared and distributed by the Commission on Training Camp Activities, band music was purchased and practiced, and hundreds of song leaders were strategically placed throughout soldier training camps to facilitate unison singing by the thousands.

The YMCA and other volunteer associations provided live musical entertainment for the troops overseas. Sing-alongs fostered camaraderie and provided a temporary escape from

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the hardships of war. Music boosted morale with positive lyrics set to cheery melodies in upbeat tempi, and many of the popular war songs assumed march-like qualities. The 1915 British song "Pack up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag (and Smile, Smile, Smile)" is emblematic of the optimistic attitude that many songs recommended. The American version of the sheet music cover suggested that the military had all but endorsed the piece, claiming, "What is best described as a PHILOSOPHY SONG is now being sung and whistled by the troops as they march along." The lyrics in the chorus ask:

*What's the use of worrying?
It never was worth while,
So pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag
And smile, smile, smile.*

Other war songs adopted a cheeky bravado, appearing fearless or scornful of potential danger. Consider the following irreverent titles: "We'll Knock the Heligo Into Heligo Out of Heligoland;" "Bing! Bang! Bing 'em on the Rhine;" "We Don't Want the Bacon (What We Want is a Piece of the Rhine);" "Keep Your Head Down, Fritzie Boy;" and "(If He Can Fight Like He Can Love) Good Night, Germany!" Composer George M. Cohan, noted for writing the defining war song, "Over There," took a more aggressive stance in "Stand Up and Fight Like H---." Lyrics in the violent chorus bluster:

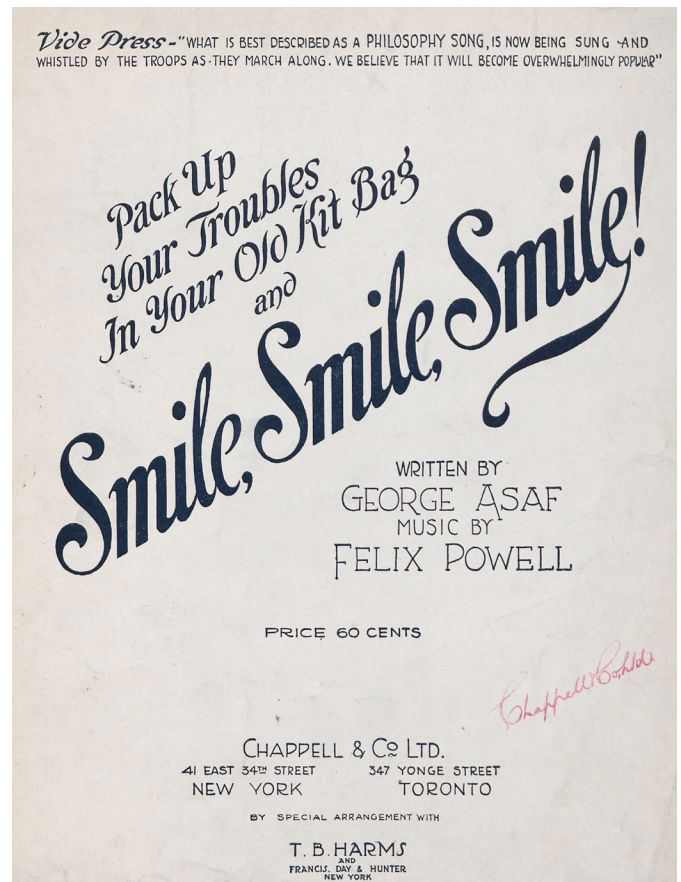
*Stand up and fight, fight for your right,
Don't give the foe a chance,
Just grab a gun and shoot the Hun
And drive him out of France.
Show Kaiser Bill you're out to kill,
Fill him with shot and shell,
And see that he gets what's coming to him,
Stand up and fight like h---.*

Brash lyrics and titles helped soldiers put on guises of experience and courage, despite their youth and any uncertainty when it came to combat.

Humorous songs acted as release valves for soldiers, a coping mechanism for the stress of war. A British song, "Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers," appealed to the public with ridiculous, tongue-twisting lyrics. Al Jolson helped popularize the tune in the United States as part of the show *Dancing Around*, which premiered in New York at the Winter Garden Theater in October 1914. In addition to Jolson's Columbia recording, Billy Murray recorded the song for Victor, and the popularity

of both recordings helped earn the song a place in *Variety* Music Cavalcade's listing of American hits from 1914. Lyrics from the chorus describe the earnest yet hopelessly inept efforts of "Sister Susie" at her sewing:

*Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers.
Such skill at sewing shirts our shy young sister Susie shows!
Some soldiers send epistles,
say they'd sooner sleep in thistles,
Than the saucy, soft, short shirts for soldiers sister Susie sews.*



"Pack up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag (and Smile, Smile, Smile)"
Sheet Music Cover

The 1918 hit, "K-K-K-Katy" was another comedic favorite with the troops, depicting a stuttering soldier's declaration of love. The sheet music cover entices potential buyers to bring home "the sensational stammering song sung by the soldiers and sailors." Written by Army song leader, Geoffrey O'Hara, "K-K-K-Katy" was a perfect vehicle for alternative lyrics created by the soldiers. The following chart highlights some of the substitute versions of the chorus:

**"K-K-K-Katy"
(Original)**

*K-K-K-Katy, beautiful Katy
You're the only g-g-g-girl
that I adore,
When the m-m-m-moon shines
Over the cowshed,
I'll be waiting at the
k-k-k-kitchen door.*

**"K-K-K-K.P."
(K.P. = Kitchen Patrol)**

*K-K-K-K-P. Dirty old K.P.,
That's the only army job
that I abhor,
When the m-m-m-moon shines
Over the guardhouse,
I'll be mopping up the
k-k-k-kitchen floor.*

**"C-C-C-Cootie"
(Cootie = Body Lice)**

*C-c-c-cootie, horrible cootie,
You're the only b-b-b-bug
that I abhor,
When the m-m-m-moon shines
Over the bunk-house,
I will scratch my b-b-b-back
until it's sore.*

One of the most beloved comedy songs of the war was "Mademoiselle from Armentiers (Hinky-Dinky, Parley Voo)." Originally an old British hit with at least 40 alternative verses describing the questionable virtues and many flaws of the young Mademoiselle, the tune was also embraced by American soldiers who added their own array of verses during World War I. The simple song was constructed with an opening phrase "Mademoiselle from Armentieres 'Parley voo'" that was repeated. Two lines of interchangeable text followed—not unlike limericks that the soldiers often improvised—before the brief piece concluded with a nonsensical tag, "Hinky, Dinky, 'Parley voo.'" A Missouri regiment came up with the following alternative verses, collected in a 1921 military songbook:

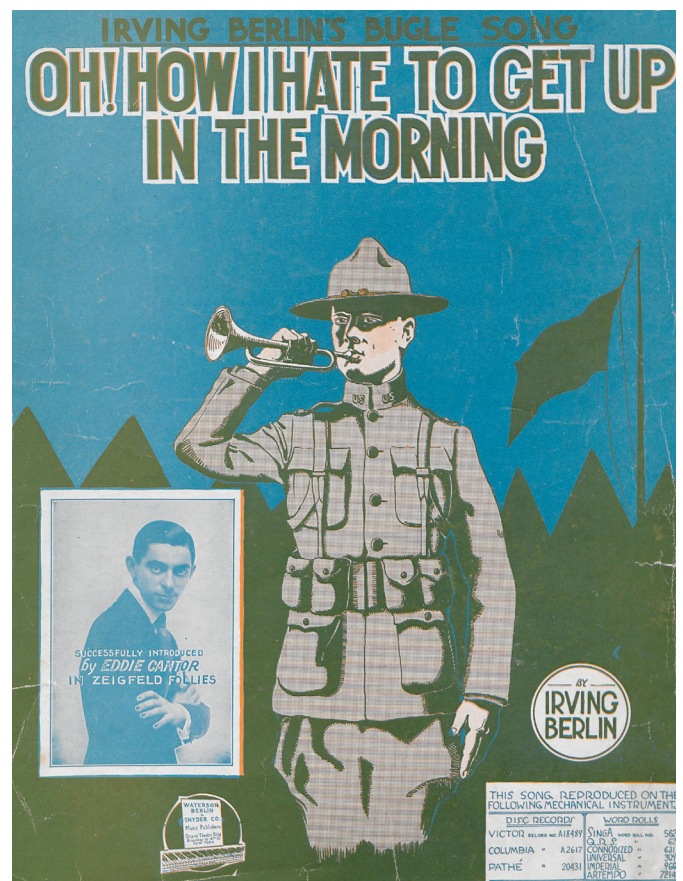
*The girls in France are very fine, parlez vous, (3 xs)
And so's the cognac and the wine
Hinky, Dinky, Parlez Vous.*

*I knew a girl in gay Paree, parlez vous, (3 xs)
And all she said was oui, oui, oui
Hinky, Dinky, Parlez Vous.*

The coarse and often offensive lyrics of "Mademoiselle from Armentiers" allowed soldiers to express pent-up frustration and sarcasm. The song was so popular that it was included as part of a war song medley in a 1929 London celebration of Armistice Day—a clear favorite among veterans.

Irving Berlin captured a comical response to the morning bugler in his 1918 song, "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning." A young recruit fantasizes about murdering the bugler in the song's hilarious chorus:

*Oh! How I hate to get up in the morning,
Oh! How I'd love to remain in bed;
For the hardest blow of all, is to hear the bugler call;
You've got to get up, you've got to get up,
You've got to get up this morning!
Someday I'm going to murder the bugler,
Someday they're going to find him dead;
I'll amputate his reveille, and step upon it heavily,
And spend the rest of my life in bed.*



"Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" Sheet Music Cover

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Berlin's joking lyrics humanize the American soldiers' experience of the war. "Good Morning, Mr. Zip-Zip-Zip!" similarly captures the soldier's perspective, with lyrics that refer to the "zip-zip-zip" buzz-cut that so many of the men shared:

*Good morning, Mister Zip-Zip-Zip!
With your hair cut just as short as mine,
Good morning, Mister Zip-Zip-Zip,
You're surely looking fine!
Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,
If the Camels* don't get you,
The Fatimas* must,
Good morning, Mister Zip-Zip-Zip,
With your hair cut just as short as,
Your hair cut just as short as,
Your hair cut just as short as mine.*

** "Camels" and "Fatimas" were cigarette brands.*

Witty, exaggerated, and sometimes crude, the humorous songs of the war served as a necessary counterpoint to the death, disease, and destruction that enveloped the soldiers.

While the overwhelming majority of war songs were positive, not all of the music the soldiers sang were upbeat or funny—some songs were sentimental or religious. Slower tempi, triple meters, and emotional lyrics combined to help soldiers connect to the values and people back home. A serious song by British musical theater composer Ivor Novello, "Keep the Home Fires Burning," was sung by Americans at home and abroad during the war. As one of the biggest hits in the United States in 1915, the song was recorded by artists on no less than five different American labels: Columbia, Paramount, Emerson, Gennett, and Victrola. The lyrics are addressed to the soldiers, their families, and their sweethearts, advocating a typically British "stiff upper lip" approach:

*Keep the home fires burning,
While your hearts are yearning,
Though your lads are far away they dream of Home;
There's a silver lining
Through the dark cloud shining,
Turn the dark cloud inside out
Till the boys come home.*

Some songs specifically evoked the people ("M-O-T-H-E-R," or "It's a Long, Long Way to the U.S.A. and the Girl I Left Behind") or places ("Indiana," or "Missouri Waltz") of home. The emotional 1918 Whiting and Egan song, "Till We Meet

Again," had one of the highest sheet music sales in history and told the story of a tender farewell between a soldier and his girlfriend:

*Smile the while you kiss me sad adieu
When the clouds roll by I'll come to you
Then the skies will seem more blue
Down in lover's lane my dearie
Wedding bells will ring so merrily
Ev'ry tear will be a memory
So wait and pray each night for me
Till we meet again.*

Sentimental songs like these voiced longing for home in a safe but brief manner, allowing soldiers to return to battle with renewed focus.

Religious hymns filled the songbooks for soldiers that were produced by the YMCA, Salvation Army, and other associations. The hymns were widely known, easy to sing, and adaptable for marching. Soldiers facing life-and-death situations on a daily basis had a special need for spiritual music, and the hymns provided comfort in difficult circumstances. As historian Glenn Watkins explains in his book, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War*, "There can be no question that the faith of the soldiers and the people back home sustained them mightily throughout the war, and that hymnody as an expression of that faith was a readily transportable and effective antidote for the human dilemma in moments of impending danger as well as in times of bereavement." Energetic hymns with war themes like "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "The Son of God Goes Forth to War" were included in the 1918 Army Song Book alongside more gentle hymns like "Abide with Me," "Lead, Kindly Light," and "Nearer, My God, to Thee." Patriotic songs like "The Star-Spangled Banner" or "America" took on a religious tone, with sentiment and patriotism mingling to fuel the soldiers' resolve. Songs from the sentimental or religious to the patriotic, humorous, boastful, or simply optimistic were a central part of the soldiers' lives—critical to maintaining a sense of humanity in the face of war.

MUSIC "OVER HERE" KEEPING AMERICANS CONNECTED TO MEN AND WOMEN "OVER THERE"

Advertisements for war songs appearing in *The Saturday Evening Post* proclaimed, "A nation that sings can never be

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beaten—each song is a milestone on the road to victory.” Music-making was as critical to supporting the morale of the citizens at home as it was to the soldiers abroad. George M. Cohan’s 1917 hit, “Over There,” captured the spirit of the country with a chorus that admonished Americans:

*So prepare, say a pray'r,
send the word, send the word to beware.
We'll be over, we're coming over,
And we won't come back till it's over over there.*

The eyes of the nation were riveted “over there,” and music connected people to the brave servicemen and women who had journeyed overseas. Titles like “We’ll Do Our Share (While You’re Over There)” and “We’ll Keep Things Going ‘Till the Boys Come Home (Won’t We, Girls?)” helped ensure continued activism at home, and the use of words like “We,” “We’ll,” “We’ve,” or “We’re” in titles encouraged Americans to join their voices in support of the war. References to “our boys” in song lyrics and titles pulled on heart-strings and helped citizens adopt the soldiers as national sons. Consider the following titles: “When Our Boys Come Home;” “Our Boys in Blue;” “God Be With Our Boys Tonight;” and “God Spare Our Boys Over There.” Unifying language—such as “we,” “our,” or “let’s”—told citizens that they were not alone, reinforcing

the sacrifices of individuals by reinforcing the connection to a national identity.

Mini songbooks and war-themed sheet music hits were marketed to Americans who wanted to sing the same songs the soldiers knew. Publisher Leo Feist led the way with a pocket-sized songbook entitled *Songs the Soldiers and Sailors Sing*. Costing a mere fifteen cents, the collection was readily available to Americans from coast to coast. Publishers also marketed “War Editions” of individual sheet music tunes in a 10 by 7 inch size that was much smaller than the standard 13 ½ by 10 ½ inch format. A brief announcement was inlaid on the cover, explaining “To Co-operate with the Government and to conserve paper during the War, this song is issued in a smaller size than usual. Save! Save! Save is the watchword to-day. This is the spirit in which we are working and your cooperation will be very much appreciated.” The War-Edition sizes were more of a publicity stunt than an emergency response to a paper shortage, however, since regular-sized editions of the same popular songs were also widely sold.

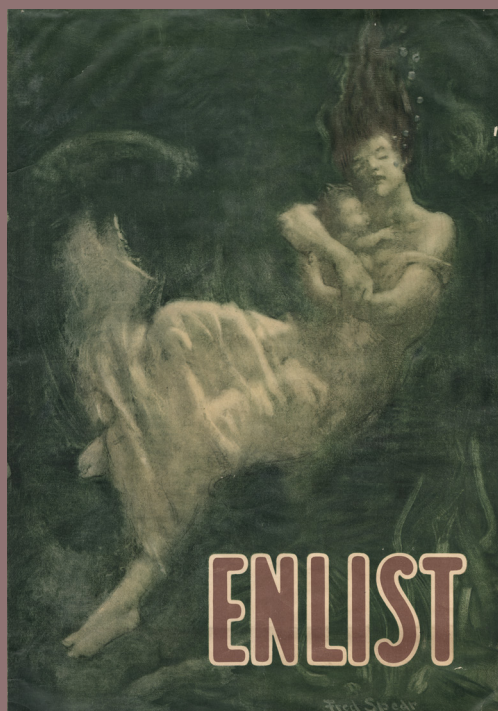
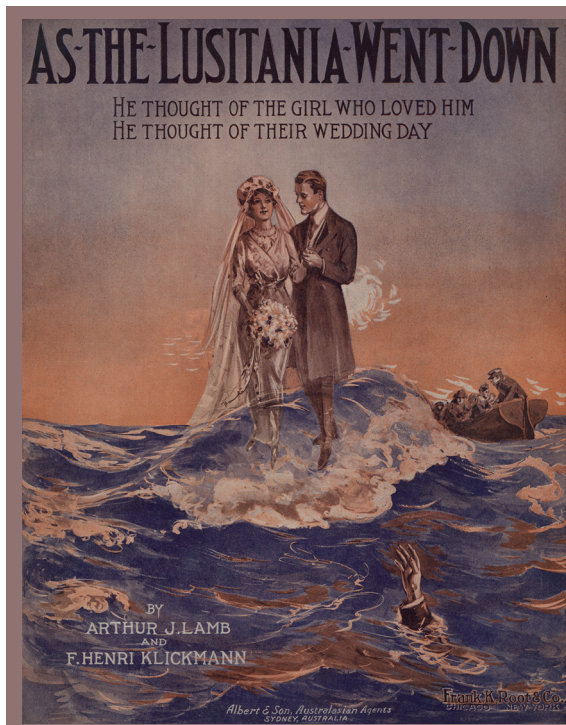
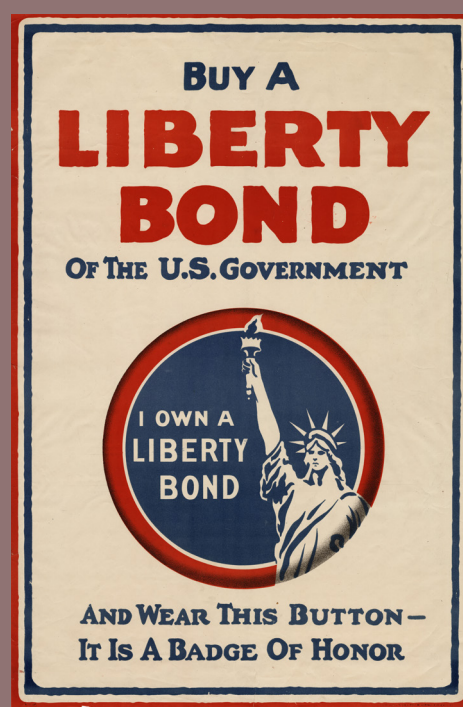
Sheet music that mirrored the images of war posters allowed citizens to literally “buy into” war propaganda and bring public messages into their homes. Note the striking similarities between the following sheet music covers and war posters:



At left: “You’re the Greatest Little Mothers in the World” sheet music cover; Right: Red Cross “Greatest Mother in the World” poster.

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At left: "What are you Going to Do to Help the Boys?" sheet music cover;
Right: "Buy a Liberty Bond" poster.



At left: "As the Lusitania Went Down" sheet music cover; Right: "Enlist" Lusitania poster.

By calling on war poster themes, the music publishing industry tapped into a cultural code. Citizens were drawn to these works, buying songs that linked to poster messaging in order to personally connect with national ideals.

Like activist posters, war songs often encouraged participation in the national war effort. Some advocated financial donations, such as "Dress Up Your Dollars in Khaki (And help

Win Democracy's Fight)." Lyrics in this chorus urged citizens to "let a War Savings Stamp send your money to camp, / And answer the President's call." Other songs rallied listeners to buy more bonds, as in "Buy a Bond, Buy a Bond for Liberty" and "What Are You Going to Do to Help the Boys? Buy a Bond!" Support for the Red Cross was inspired by songs such as "Let's Help the Red Cross Now" and "The Red Cross Needs You Now." Women were encouraged to knit their support

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for the war with titles like “Each Stitch is a Thought of You, Dear,” “Knitting Song,” “Knitting,” “Knit, Knit, Knit,” “There’s a Girl Who’s Knitting for You,” and the soldier’s question, “I Wonder Who’s Knitting for Me?” Women also took on more progressive roles at home, as the lyrics in “We’ll Keep Things Going ‘Till the Boys Come Home (Won’t We, Girls?)” explained:

*We’ll keep things going till the boys come home,
Won’t we girls?
Bet your life, every sweetheart and wife,
Will do her bit for Yankee Doodle,
We’ll take care of all the Boodle, Won’t we girls?
You bet your life, Mother’s taking Father’s job, he
was a steeple Jack,
She wears a pair of overalls, that button
up the back,
And she’ll have a “Ripping” time some day when
she climbs up a stack!
But we’ll keep things going till the boys come home.*

A similar message is contained in “Ev’ry Girl is Doing Her Bit Today,” whose chorus remarked:

*Ev’ry girl is ready to do her duty,
Lots of girls are doing it rather well,
Work you thought they could not do,
Girls are putting their shoulders to.*

Despite gender reversals in the workplace, the second verse reassured the public of women’s continued femininity, promising:

*But one little thing is well worth knowing:
To equal the men is not our aim;
We simply want to keep things going,
We are women just the same.*

References to women’s war participation—though often tempered with humor or an emphasis on the temporary nature of women’s war roles—would eventually contribute to the passage of the 19th amendment following the war’s end, granting women the right to vote.

Songs that were popular at home sometimes painted naively inaccurate pictures of what the soldiers and other young volunteers experienced during the war. The cover of “I Don’t Want to Get Well” features a wounded soldier who lovingly gazes at his nurse. The song’s improbable chorus proclaims:

*Early ev’ry morning, night and noon,
the cutest little girlie comes and feeds me
with a spoon;
I don’t want to get well,
I don’t want to get well,
I’m glad they shot me on the fighting line, fine,
The doctor says that I’m in bad condition,
But Oh, Oh, Oh, I’ve got so much ambition,
I don’t want to get well,
I don’t want to get well,
For I’m having a wonderful time.*

The song glosses over the stressful and often grotesque conditions of war hospitals, which would hardly have served as appropriate material for a popular song. Romanticized depictions of love-struck soldiers and nurses were not uncommon, seen in titles like “My Red Cross Girlie (The Wound is Somewhere in My Heart)” or “That Red Cross Girl of Mine.” The James Monaco song “I’m Going to Follow the



“My Red Cross Girlie (The Wound is Somewhere in My Heart)”
Sheet Music Cover

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Boys” describes a boy-crazy recruit who is more interested in chasing her former dancing partners than in nursing. Lyrics in the chorus highlight her carefree attitude:

*I'm going to follow the boys over there,
Anywhere, I don't care,
I'm just dying for one little dance,
But all my dancing partners are "Somewhere
in France."
I never nursed anyone, I'll admit,
But I'm strong to do my bit,
And if one little kiss or more,
Can help them win the war,
Then I'm going to follow the boys.*

While flirtatious or sexualized depictions of nurses trivialized the sacrifices women made during the war, portrayals of

women on pedestals were no more accurate. Angelic nurses were a favorite topic, as titles like “Angels of the Trench,” “Angel of No Man’s Land,” and “Angels of the Cross of Red” attest. Lyrics in the second verse of “The Rose of No Man’s Land” describe the nurse’s holiness with several references to her heavenly origins:

*Out of the heavenly splendor,
Down to the trail of woe,
God in his mercy has sent her,
Cheering the world below;
We call her “Rose of Heaven,”
We've learned to love her so.*

Though flattering, super-human depictions of nurses and other women did little to realistically convey the courage of women who served in the war.

Listen to a few of these WWI-era songs, courtesy of Archive.org:

“Goodbye Broadway, Hello France” — <https://archive.org/details/edba-3321>

“It’s A Long Way To Tipperary” — <https://archive.org/details/ItsALongLongWayToTipperaryVocal>

“K-K-K-Katy” — <https://archive.org/details/K-k-kKaty>

“Keep the Home Fires Burning” — https://archive.org/details/MVI5451KeepTheHomeFires_20140802

“Over There” — https://archive.org/details/OverThere_508

Essay by Dr. Kristin Griffeath, Associate Professor of Music at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and Guest Curator for the 2013 exhibition *Harmonies on the Homefront* at the National World War I Museum and Memorial. All images courtesy of the National World War I Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A.

