

# NATIONAL ANTHEMS AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT

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The Winter Olympics provided an excellent example of how music, in the form of national anthems, plays an important role in fostering national pride when performed at sporting events and other special occasions.

Although national anthems are common today, it was not until the 20th century that most countries had adopted an official national anthem. This was partly because there was no way of broadcasting anthems to a wide audience before the days of radio and television. Surprisingly, virtually every national anthem was not written by a great composer with the exception of the German National Anthem, originally the Austrian anthem, which was composed by Joseph Haydn in 1797. Haydn also used the anthem's melody for his Emperor String Quartet.

There are generally two types of national anthems: hymns which make references to God saving a country or ruler, and the military type of anthem that makes references to war and nationalism. Great Britain is thought to be the first nation to have a national anthem when it adopted God Save the King or Queen. This anthem was written in 1745 by an unknown composer. Although O Canada was written in 1880, it did not become our official national anthem until 1980. There are still countries, such as Finland, that do not have an official anthem. Instead, they have an unofficial anthem that has been adopted through popular use. It is also interesting that some countries, Spain being one, do not have words for their national anthems.

The custom of playing the national anthem of the country represented by the winner of each event at the Olympics was introduced at the 1924 Olympic Games. The playing of the national anthem(s) of teams before the start of games in sports leagues became a tradition when O Canada began to be performed at National Hockey League games played between Canadian teams during World War Two. The American national anthem then began to be played regularly at Major League Baseball games.

So the next time you sing O Canada, think of the powerful affect that national anthems have on the human spirit.

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