



## O Canada! Our National Anthem

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# The National Anthem of Canada

## History of the National Anthem

Many people think of Calixa Lavallée as an obscure music teacher who dashed off a patriotic song in a moment of inspiration. The truth is quite different. Lavallée was, in fact, known as "Canada's national musician" and it was on this account that he was asked to compose the music for a poem written by Judge Adolphe-Basile Routhier. The occasion was the "Congrès national des Canadiens-Français" in 1880, which was being held at the same time as the St. Jean-Baptiste Day celebrations.

There had been some thought of holding a competition for a national hymn to have its first performance on St. Jean-Baptiste Day, June 24, but by January the committee in charge decided there was not enough time, so the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, the Honourable Théodore Robitaille, commissioned Judge Routhier to write a hymn and Lavallée to compose the tune. Lavallée made a number of drafts before the tune we know was greeted with enthusiasm by his musical friends. It is said that in the excitement of success Lavallée rushed to show his music to the Lieutenant Governor without even stopping to sign the manuscript.

The first performance took place on June 24, 1880 at a banquet in the "Pavillon des Patineurs" in Quebec City as the climax of a "Mosaïque sur des airs populaires canadiens" arranged by Joseph Vézina, a prominent composer and bandmaster.

Although this first performance of "O Canada" with Routhier's French words was well received on the evening, it does not seem to have made a lasting impression at that time. Arthur Lavigne, a Quebec musician and music dealer, published it without copyright but there was no rush to reprint. Lavallée's obit in 1891 doesn't mention it among his accomplishments, nor does a biography of Judge Routhier published in 1898. French Canada is represented in the 1887 edition of the University of Toronto song book by "Vive la canadienne", "A la claire fontaine" and "Un canadien errant".

English Canada in general probably first heard "O Canada" when school children sang it when the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall (later King George V and Queen Mary) toured Canada in 1901. Five years later Whaley and Royce in Toronto published the music with the French text and a translation into English made by Dr. Thomas Bedford Richardson, a Toronto doctor. The Mendelssohn Choir used the Richardson lyrics in one of their performances about this time and Judge Routhier and the French press complimented the author.

## Richardson version:

O Canada! Our fathers' land of old  
Thy brow is crown'd with leaves of red and gold.  
Beneath the shade of the Holy Cross  
Thy children own their birth  
No stains thy glorious annals gloss  
Since valour shield thy hearth.  
Almighty God! On thee we call  
Defend our rights, defend this nation's thrall,  
Defend our rights, defend this nation's thrall.

In 1908 Collier's Weekly inaugurated its Canadian edition with a competition for an English text to Lavallée's music. It was won by Mercy E. Powell McCulloch, but her version did not take.



### **McCulloch version:**

O Canada! In praise of thee we sing;  
From echoing hills our anthems proudly ring.  
With fertile plains and mountains grand  
With lakes and rivers clear,  
Eternal beauty, thos dost stand  
Throughout the changing year.  
Lord God of Hosts! We now implore  
Bless our dear land this day and evermore,  
Bless our dear land this day and evermore.

Since then many English versions have been written for "O Canada". Poet Wilfred Campbell wrote one. So did Augustus Bridle, Toronto critic. Some were written for the 1908 tercentenary of Quebec City. One version became popular in British Columbia...

### **Buchan version:**

O Canada, our heritage, our love  
Thy worth we praise all other lands above.  
From sea to see throughout their length  
From Pole to borderland,  
At Britain's side, whate'er betide  
Unflinchingly we'll stand  
With hearts we sing, "God save the King",  
Guide then one Empire wide, do we implore,  
And prosper Canada from shore to shore.

However, the version that gained the widest currency was made in 1908 by Robert Stanley Weir, a lawyer and at the time Recorder of the City of Montréal. A slightly modified version of the 1908 poem was published in an official form for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927, and has since been generally accepted in English speaking Canada. Following further minor amendments, the first verse of Weir's poem was proclaimed as Canada's national anthem in 1980. The version adopted pursuant to the National Anthem Act in 1980 reads as follows:

O Canada! Our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all thy sons command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North, strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land glorious and free !  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

Many musicians have made arrangements of "O Canada" but there appears to be a scarcity of recordings suitable for various purposes.

### **Calixa Lavallée**

Calixa Lavallée was a "canadien errant", a man who left his country for greener fields, but who nevertheless loved Canada and returned to it, returned with a reputation well earned in the United States and France to become the "national musician" of Canada. He was, in his time, a composer operettas, at least one symphony, various occasional pieces and songs; he was a pianist and organist of considerable note and he was a teacher who wanted to found the first Canadian Conservatory.



The famous Canadian choral conductor Augustus Stephen Volt said of him: "I became acquainted with Lavallée in the 80's of the last century, when I was in Boston as a student of music, and he impressed me as a man of extraordinary ability - not merely as a clever executant of the piano, and not merely as an adroit deviser of pretty melodies and sensuous harmonies, but as a genuinely creative artist, a pure musical genius".

Calixa Lavallée was born in Verchères, Canada East, on December 28, 1842, the son of Augustin Lavallée, a woodcutter and blacksmith, who became an instrument repairman, bandleader and music teacher. Later when the family moved to St-Hyacinthe, the father worked for the famous organ-builder Joseph Casavant and led the townband. Calixa showed talent early and played the organ in the cathedral at the age of eleven. Two years later he gave a piano recital at the Théâtre Royal in Montréal. In Montréal Lavallée met Léon Derome, a butcher who loved music. He became Lavallée's lifelong patron and friend, often coming to his aid in bad times.

About this time, Calixa tired of regular lessons and left Montréal to try his luck in the United States. In New Orleans, he won a competition which in turn won him a job as accompanist to the famous Spanish violinist Olivera. After touring with Olivera in Brazil and the West Indies, Lavallée joined the Northern army during the American Civil War. Leaving the U.S. army as a lieutenant, Lavallée returned to Montréal where he gave piano lessons and played cornet in a theatre orchestra.

In 1865 he returned to the United States to teach and give a series of concert tours. He married and began to work with Arnold de Thiers, with whom he composed a comic opera called "Loulou". The night before its first performance, the owner of the opera house was shot and the theatre closed. Lavallée, who had been conductor and artistic director of the theatre, the New York Grand Opera House, found himself out of a job. He returned to Montréal in 1872 to a warm welcome from his friends, and had soon set up a studio with Jehin Prume and Rositadel Vecchio, well-known musicians. Success in Montréal brought him the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, to continue his musical education in Paris. A group of friends led by Derome made him a monthly allowance while he studied with Bazin, Boieldieu and Marmontel. A Lavallée symphony was performed by a Paris orchestra in 1874 and his teachers predicted a great future for him.

Lavallée decided to devote his life to the establishment of a conservatory in Canada. To prove that talent existed, he mounted a Gounod drama with an all-Canadian cast of 80. The venture was a great success and Lavallée had high hopes of interesting the government in his idea. But although the public responded warmly to his productions, official quarters gave nothing but vague promises.

It was during this Quebec period, in 1880 that Lavallée composed the music of "O Canada" for the "Congrès national des Canadiens-Français". But he could see nothing ahead but routine teaching and playing, so once again he took off for the United States.

Things took a turn for the better. He was appointed an organist and choirmaster; he toured with the famous Hungarian soprano Etelka Gerster; he increased his composing; many of his works were performed including "Tiq", a "melodramatic musical satire" on the Indian question and his comic opera "The Widow". As a member of the Music Teachers' National Association, he organized a number of very successful concerts, and finally, in 1887, was elected president.

In 1888 Lavallée represented the professional musicians of America in London and introduced American compositions in London where the Lord Mayor gave a dinner in his honour.

Lavallée's health had been poor for some years and after his return to Boston became much worse. By the autumn of 1890 he was bedridden and in financial straits. He died on January 21, 1891, at the age of 49, leaving some 60 works, only about half of which have been found.

Lavallée was buried near Boston but his body was brought back to Canada in 1933 and now rests in Montréal Cemetery Côte-des-Neiges.



## **Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier**

Adolphe-Basile Routhier was born in May 8, 1839 in Saint-Placide (Lower Canada). He studied at the University of Laval, and was a distinguished lawyer in Kamouraska.

He was appointed judge of the Quebec Superior Court in 1873, and later became Chief Justice of Quebec from 1904 until his retirement in 1906.

He was probably better known as a poet than as a judge, and it was natural that the Honourable Théodore Robitaille, Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, should turn to him to write the words of an hymn for the great "Congrès national des Canadiens-Français" in 1880. His poem "O Canada!" was widely praised on its first presentation.

Sir Adolphe was made a knight of the The Most Honourable Order of the Bath in 1911. He was a founding member of the Royal Society of Canada, and was president of that society from 1914-1915. Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier died on June 27, 1920, at Saint-Irenée-des-Bains, Quebec.

## **The Honourable Robert Stanley Weir**

Robert Stanley Weir (1856-1926) was born in Hamilton, in what was then Canada West. He took all his higher education in Montreal, and was qualified for both teaching and the law. He chose law and rose rapidly in the profession, becoming in due course, like Routhier, a judge first as Recorder of the City of Montréal and later to the Exchequer Court of Canada (now the Federal Court of Canada). He wrote both learned legal works and poetry, and his fame as a writer won him election as a Fellow of the Royal Society which Routhier had helped found.

## **Parliamentary Action**

By the time the World War broke out in 1914, "O Canada" was the best known patriotic song in Canada, edging out "The Maple leaf Forever" and others less well-known today.

1924 - The association of Canadian Clubs passed a unanimous resolution recommending the Weir version as suitable for use at Club meetings.

Since then the I.O.D.E. and the Canadian Authors Association have endorsed it and in 1958 the Native Sons of Canada found in favour of it.

1927 - An official version of "O Canada" was authorized for singing in Canadian schools and for use at public functions.

1942 - July 27. The Prime Minister, the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King, was asked if he did not think this an appropriate time for proclaiming a national anthem. He replied that "There are times and seasons for all things and this time of war when there are other more important questions with which parliament has to deal, we might well continue to follow what has become the custom in Canada in recent years of regarding "God Save The King" and "O Canada" each as national anthems and entitled to similar recognition." He said further that this was his opinion, his government's opinion and he had no doubt it was the opinion of most people in the country.

Some years later, his successor as Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Louis St-Laurent made a similar statement.

1964 - A government resolution authorized the formation of a special joint committee to consider the status of "God Save The Queen" and "O Canada".

1966 - January 31. The Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, placed a notice of motion on the order paper "That the government be authorized to take such steps as may be necessary to provide that "O Canada" shall be the National Anthem of Canada while "God Save The Queen" shall be the Royal Anthem of Canada.



1967 - March 15. The special joint committee "unanimously recommends that the government be authorized to adopt forthwith the music for "O Canada" composed by Calixa Lavallée as the music of the National Anthem of Canada with the following notation added to the sheet music: With dignity, not too slowly.

"God Save The Queen" was found to be in the public domain as the Royal Anthem of Canada, but for "O Canada" the committee deemed it "essential to take such steps as necessary to appropriate the copyright to the music providing that it shall belong to Her Majesty in right of Canada for all time. This provision would also include that no other person shall be entitled to copyright in the music or any arrangements or adaptations thereof."

The committee recommended further study of the lyrics. It suggested keeping the original French version and using the Weir English version with minor changes - that is replacing two of the "Stand on guard" phrases with "From far and wide" and "God keep our land".

There was no trouble with the music copyright which had by now descended to Gordon V. Thompson. They were willing to sell for \$1, but the heirs of Judge Weir objected to the changes in the original version. Since Judge Weir died in 1926, the Weir version would not come into public domain until 1976. There was some doubt that the Weir family had legal grounds for objection since Thompson's apparently held copyright on both music and English words. However the committee preferred to settle the matter amicably if at all possible. The Government acquired the rights from G.V. Thompson in 1970.

#### **The version recommended by the committee:**

O Canada! our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all thy sons command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

1972 - February 28 - The Secretary of State of Canada, the Honourable Gérard Pelletier, presented a bill in the House of Commons proposing the adoption of "O Canada" as the National Anthem of Canada. The recommendations of the 1967 study in Parliament are incorporated in the bill, which did not receive further study in Parliament and died on the order paper. The same legislation was reintroduced by Mr. Pelletier's successors at further sessions of Parliament; no action was ever taken.

1980 - June 18 - The Secretary of State of Canada, the Honourable Francis Fox, presented a bill, similar to previously presented bills on "O Canada", fulfilling a promise made earlier in the House that "O Canada" be proclaimed as Canada's national anthem as soon as possible in this year of the centenary of the first rendition. The bill was unanimously accepted by the House of Commons and the Senate on June 27; Royal assent was given the same day.

July 1 - The Governor General, His Excellency the Right Honourable Edward Schreyer, proclaimed the Act respecting the National Anthem of Canada, thus making "O Canada" an official symbol of the country. A public ceremony was held at noon on Parliament Hill in front of thousands of Canadians. Descendants of Weir and Routhier were on the official platform, as well as the successor of Robitaille, the Honourable Jean-Pierre Côté.



## Original Poem by Weir

Originally "O Canada" was a patriotic poem by Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier, a Quebec judge. Calixa Lavallée, the well-known Canadian composer, was commissioned to set it to music, and it was first sung in 1880 during a national convention of French Canadians in Quebec City. Many English versions have appeared, but the one which was widely accepted was written in 1908 by another judge, R. Stanley Weir, in honour of the 300th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City. It was amended in 1913, 1914 and 1916 and published in an official form at the time of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927 and during the Royal visit of 1939. A slightly modified version of the first verse of Weir's poem was proclaimed as Canada's national anthem in 1980. The original poem of 1908 by Stanley Weir reads as follows:

O Canada! Our home and native land!  
True patriot love thou dost in us command.  
We see thee rising fair, dear land,  
The True North, strong and free;  
And stand on guard, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.

### Refrain

O Canada! O Canada!  
O Canada! We stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada! We stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada! Where pines and maples grow.  
Great prairies spread and lordly rivers flow.  
How dear to us thy broad domain,  
From East to Western Sea,  
Thou land of hope for all who toil!  
Thou True North, strong and free!

### Refrain

O Canada! O Canada! etc.  
O Canada! Beneath thy shining skies  
May stalwart sons and gentle maidens rise,  
To keep thee steadfast through the years  
From East to Western Sea,  
Our own beloved native land!  
Our True North, strong and free!

### Refrain

O Canada! O Canada! etc.  
Ruler supreme, who hearest humble prayer,  
Hold our dominion within thy loving care;  
Help us to find, O God, in thee  
A lasting, rich reward,  
As waiting for the Better Day,  
We ever stand on guard.

### Refrain

O Canada! O Canada! etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "National Anthem: O Canada." Canadian Heritage website. [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/sc-cs/anthem\\_e.cfm#h1](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/sc-cs/anthem_e.cfm#h1). Copied directly.

# NATIONAL ANTHEM / HYMNE NATIONAL

## O CANADA

O Can - a - da! Our home and na - tive  
 O Can - a - da! Ter - re de nos aï -

land! True pa - triot love in  
 eux, Ton front est ceint de

all thy sons com - mand With glow - ing hearts we  
 fleu - rons glo - ri - eux! Carton bras sait por - ter l'é -

see thee rise, The True North strong and free! From  
 pé - é - e, Il sait por - ter la croix! Ton his -

far and wide O Can - a - da, we stand on guard for thee.  
 toire est une é - po - pé - é - e Des plus bril - lants ex - ploits

God keep our land glo - rious and free!  
 Et ta va - leur, de foi trem - pée,

O Can - a - da, we stand on guard for thee.  
 Pro - té - ge - ra nos foy - ers et nos droits.

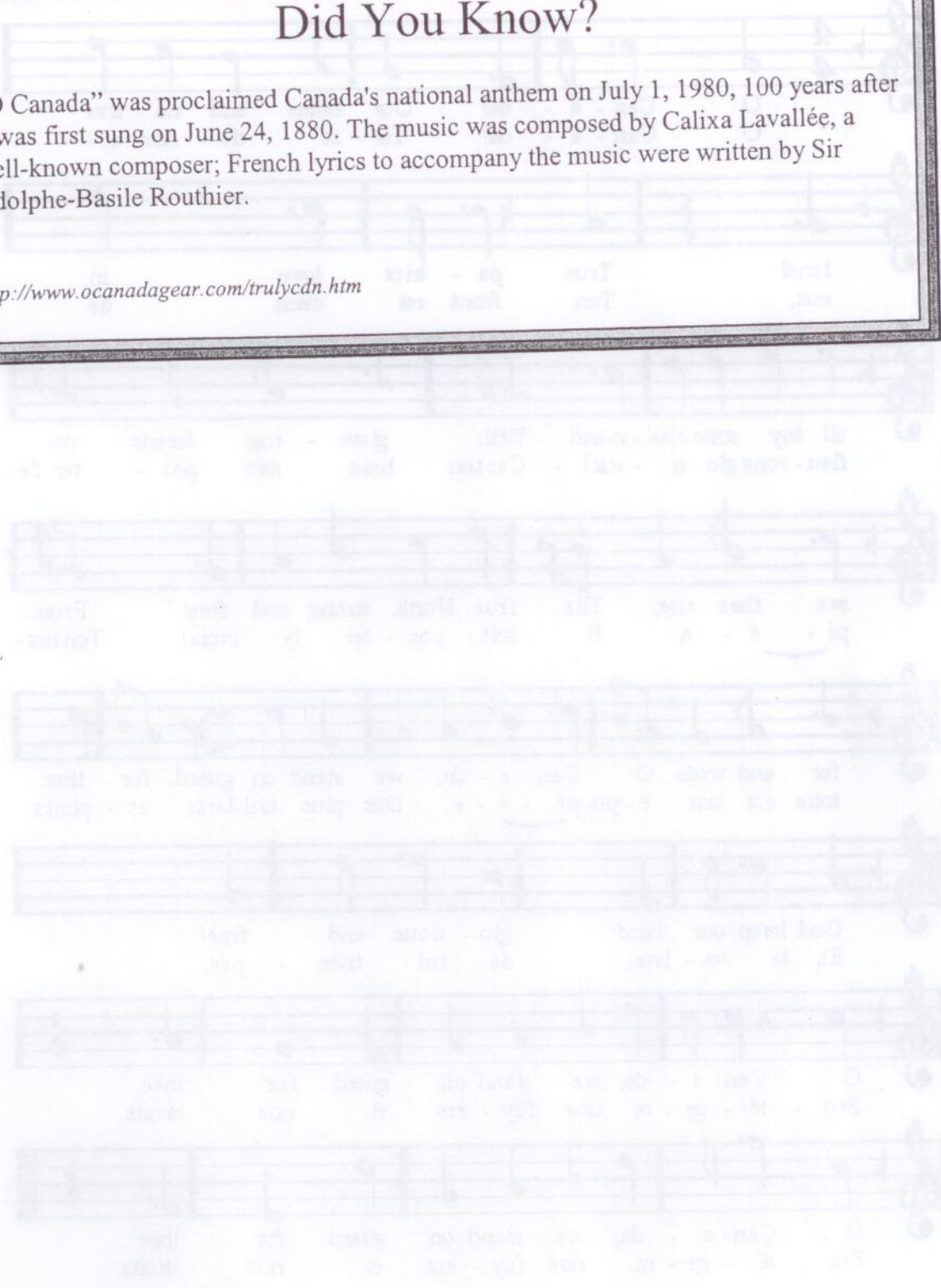
O Can - a - da, we stand on guard for thee.  
 Pro - té - ge - ra nos foy - ers et nos droits.



## Did You Know?

“O Canada” was proclaimed Canada's national anthem on July 1, 1980, 100 years after it was first sung on June 24, 1880. The music was composed by Calixa Lavallée, a well-known composer; French lyrics to accompany the music were written by Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier.

<http://www.ocanadagear.com/trulycdn.htm>





O Canada: Our national Anthem  
Quiz



1. The first performance took place when?
  - a, June 24, 1850
  - b, June 24, 1880
  - c, June 14, 1880
  - d, September 1, 2005
  
2. The musician know as “Canada’s National Musician” was
  - a, James Hewitt
  - b, John Davy
  - c, Benjamin Robert Tubb
  - d, Calixa Lavallee
  
3. In 1880, Lavallee composed “O Canada’s” music, for...
  - a, Cote-des-Neiges
  - b, Bureau de Traductions
  - c, Congres national des Canadiens-Francais
  - d, The Queen
  
4. Who translated the anthem into English?
  - a, Dr. Thomas Bedford
  - b, Sir Adolphe-Basile Routhier
  - c, Gerard Pelletier
  - d, Edward Schreyer
  
5. On what date did the Secretary of State of Canada, the Honorable Francis Fox, present a bill to fulfill earlier promises of making “O Canada” the national anthem as soon as possible?
  - a, 1980, June 18
  - b, 1980, December 21
  - c, 1980, January 1
  - d, !880, June 18



# O Canada: Our National Anthem Quiz Answers

Q' 1880' June 18

1. B

Q' 1880' December 31

2. D

Q' 1880' June 18

3. C

Q' On what date did the Parliament of Great Britain pass the Honorable Francis

4. A

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