

## Be Still, My Soul

The Christian hymn "Be Still, My Soul", written in German ("Stille meine Wille, dein Jesus hilft siegen") in 1752 by Katharina Amalia Dorothea von Schlegel (1697–1768) and translated into English in 1855 by Jane Laurie Borthwick (1813–1897), is usually sung to this tune. It begins:

*Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change He, faithful, will remain.  
Be still, my soul, thy best, thy heavenly friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

## Finlandia

The *Finlandia Hymn* (in Finnish *Finlandia-hymni*) refers to a serene hymn-like section of the patriotic symphonic poem *Finlandia*, written in 1899 and 1900 by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. It was later re-worked by the composer into a stand-alone piece. With words written in 1941 by Veikko Antero Koskenniemi, the *Finlandia Hymn* is one of the most important national songs of Finland (though *Maamme* is the de facto national anthem).

Other words commonly sung to the same melody include six Christian hymns (*Be Still, My Soul*; *I Sought the Lord*; *We Rest on Thee*; *A Christian Home*; *This Is My Song*; and *I Then Shall Live*), *Gweddi dros Gymru* or *A Prayer for Wales* (a national song of Wales), *Ambrosian Oaks* (the alma mater of St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa), and *Land of the Rising Sun* (the national anthem of the short-lived African state of Biafra). It is also the tune for Capital University's alma mater, "O Capital."

After the success of the full-length symphonic poem (most of which consists of rousing and turbulent passages, evoking the national struggle of the Finnish people), Sibelius published a stand-alone version of the hymn as the last of twelve numbers in his *Masonic Ritual Music*, Op. 113, with a text by opera singer Wäinö Sola. The version usually heard today has lyrics written by Veikko Antero Koskenniemi and was first performed in 1941. Sibelius himself arranged the hymn for choral performances.

The *de facto* national anthem of Finland is *Maamme (Our Land)*, but it has never been officially recognised. There have been numerous suggestions that the *Finlandia Hymn* should become the national anthem. However, *Maamme* is already so widely recognised and used that it would be difficult to dislodge it. Furthermore, the *Finlandia Hymn* requires a more advanced musical skill to perform properly.<sup>[1]</sup><sup>[not in citation given]</sup>

## Lyrics

A literal translation of the lyrics would be:

*O, Finland, behold, your day is dawning,  
The threat of night has been banished away,  
And the lark of morning in the brightness sings,  
As though the very firmament would ring.  
The powers of the night are vanquished by the morning light,  
Your day is dawning, O land of birth.  
O, rise, Finland, raise up high  
Your head, wreathed with great memories.  
O, rise, Finland, you showed to the world  
That you drove away the slavery,  
And that you did not bend under oppression,  
Your day has come, O land of birth.*

"Be Still My Soul," above, is the leadoff track from the new album. Perhaps you've heard the song before? It's a fairly popular Christian hymn: "Be still my soul, for God is on your side," it begins. But it's also quite likely that if you have heard this tune before, it had different lyrics — or even no lyrics at all.

The original melody comes from a small section of composer Jean Sibelius' piece *Finlandia*, written in 1899. Since it was for a Finnish pride event when Finland was seeking independence from Russia, it has assumed a place in the Finnish national imagination. In 1941, there were words added to the "hymn" section, beginning, "Finland, behold, thy daylight now is dawning." That hymn is now an unofficial national anthem in Finland, akin to "America, The Beautiful" in this country.

Obviously, those aren't the only words which go with this melody. "This Is My Song" is another popular rendition, and curiously, the lyrics carry a message of overarching holy governance (above any nationalistic concerns such as, say, Finnish pride): "This is my song, O God of all the nations / A song of peace for lands afar and mine." An NPR Music colleague says he used to sing this melody as "I Sought The Lord" as a kid in church. And if Wikipedia is to be believed, there are — sectarian and secular — that go with the "Finlandia Hymn."

"Be Still My Soul" is just one of those versions. The words originally come from a German woman named Katharina von Schlegel, who died in 1768. The English translation comes from a Scottish woman named Jane Borthwick, who died in 1897. Since *Finlandia* first appeared in 1899, that means the lyrics actually pre-date the melody!

In any event, "Be Still My Soul" was the version known to Dave Douglas' mother, Emily Douglas. Before she died of ovarian cancer last year, she left her son with a collection of hymns and folk songs to play at her memorial service, this being one of them. Dave Douglas has found some inspiration in them, arranging and rearranging the music for a new band and a new collaborator in Aoife O'Donovan. In a newsletter, he writes, "Far from funereal (!), playing these tunes has become a true celebration for us, and the kind of party that Emily would have wanted." *Be Still* the album collects these arrangements and adds a few originals too.

Jazz folks often breathe new life into old tunes. Of course, sometimes those old tunes have seen many lives before any jazz musicians get there in the first place.