



Amhrán na bhFiann:
**Celebrating a
 Century as
 Ireland's
 National
 Anthem**



**Peadar
 Kearney**
 writer of
'Amhrán na bhFiann'
 (Image: Wikipedia)

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On 12 July, 1926, the executive council of the Irish Free State decided to adopt the music of 'The Soldier's Song' 'Amhrán na bhFiann' as the official national anthem. As this year marks the 100 year milestone we include a little background on our national anthem.

Amhrán na bhFiann – The Soldier's Song



Since its adoption the song has become a powerful symbol of Irish identity, resilience, and pride, echoing through every major national event, sports gathering, and cultural celebration across the country.

Originally written in English by Peadar Kearney in 1907, the 'Soldier's Song' was later translated into the Irish language by Liam O'Rinn. The music was written by Peadar Kearney and Patrick Heeney. All three men were from Dublin's north inner city. In fact, Kearney was an uncle of Irish author, poet and playwright Brendan Behan being a brother of Behan's mother.

The song comprises three verses and a chorus. It was the chorus that was formally adopted as the National Anthem in 1926, replacing 'God Save Ireland'. The Irish Volunteers had adopted the song in 1914 but it wasn't until 1916 that it became known when it was sung in the GPO during the Easter Rising.

The path to its acceptance and adoption was not a smooth one. Since the mid-eighteenth century, like other countries colonised by the British Empire, the Irish people had *God Save the King/Queen* as their official national anthem. Even after the Irish Free State was founded in 1922, there remained unionists in Ireland who still recognised *God Save the King* as their national anthem. The two sides who had fought each other with such vigour in the Civil War would find it difficult to find a song that resonated with both and insulted neither.

During the War of Independence, *The Soldier's Song* was sung by Sinn Féin supporters and the Irish Volunteers; for a while it was known as the 'Sinn Féin anthem'. It grew in popularity and even made its way across the Atlantic, where it was hugely popular in Irish-American circles.

William Thomas Cosgrave (5 June 1880 – 16 November 1965) served as the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State from 1922 to 1932. On 28 April 1924 he expressed opposition to replacing *The Soldier's Song*, which had provisionally been used by the state up to that point. Seán Lester, publicist at the Department of External Affairs, considered *The Soldier's Song* to be 'hardly suitable in words or music', and favoured the music, though not the words, of *Let Erin Remember*. This was used as the anthem at the 1924 Olympics and other events abroad for the next two years.

The *Dublin Evening Mail* held contests in 1924 and 1925 to find verses for a new anthem; the first produced no sufficiently good entry, and the second's winning entry was soon forgotten. *The Soldier's Song* was formally adopted on 12 July 1926.

The controversy over the song was succeeded by another regarding its copyright. In 1934 the Department of Finance acquired the copyright to the song for £1,200, and the Irish-language *Amhrán na bhFiann* became the official national anthem of Ireland.

Peadar Kearney, who had received royalties from sheet music publishers, issued legal proceedings for royalties from those now performing the anthem. He was joined by Michael Heeney, brother of Patrick Heeney, who had died in 1911.

Copyright law changed in the 1950s such that the government had to reacquire copyright in 1965, for £2,500. While the state held the copyright, most requests for publication were accepted, 'although several of a purely commercial nature, such as its use in advertisements, were refused'. As per EU copyright law, the English lyrics' copyright expired on 1 January 2013, following the 70th anniversary of Kearney's death. In 2016 the Oireachtas enacted bills to restore the song's copyright to the state.

Sources:

Historyireland.com

Gov.ie

Rte.ie

Amhrán na bhFiann

Sinne Fianna Fáil,
atá faoi gheall ag Éirinn,
Buíon dár slua
thar toinn do ráinig chugainn,
Faoi mhóid bheith saor
Seantír ár sinsear feasta,
Ní fhágfar faoin tiorán ná faoin tráill.
Anocht a théam sa bhearna bhaoil,
Le gean ar Ghaeil, chun báis nó saoil,
Le gunna-scréach faoi lámhach na bpiléar,
Seo libh canaig' amhrán na bhFiann.

(source: gov.ie)



- The first draft of the text, handwritten on copybook paper, sold at auction in Dublin in 2006 for €760,000
- The 1961 television broadcast of the national anthem, was the very first piece of media shown on the opening night of Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ)
- The first two lines of the anthem and the last two, played together, form the Presidential Salute, which is played when the President of Ireland attends official events.