

Heart of Oak

Chords for 'Heart of Oak':

Staff 1: G, B7, Em, C, G, C, Am, Em, B7, Em

Staff 2: Am, D7, G, B7, Em, D, B7, Em, D7, G, G, D, Bm

Staff 3: D, A7, D, Chorus, D, B7, Em, B7, Em, B7, Em

Staff 4: C, D, C, D, A7, G, D7, G

1. Come, cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer,
To add something more to this wonderful year;
To honour we call you, as freemen not slaves,
For who are so free as the sons of the waves?

Chorus:

Heart of Oak are our ships,
Jolly Tars are our men,
We always are ready: Steady, boys, Steady!
We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again.

2. We ne'er see our foes but we wish them to stay,
They never see us but they wish us away;
If they run, why we follow, and run them ashore,
For if they won't fight us, what can we do more?

Chorus

3. They say they'll invade us, these terrible foe,
They frighten our women, our children, our beaus,
But if should their flat-bottoms, in darkness set oar,
Still Britons they'll find to receive them on shore.

Chorus

4. We still make them feel and we still make them flee,
And drub them ashore as we drub them at sea,
Then cheer up me lads with one heart let us sing,
Our soldiers and sailors, our statesmen and king.

Chorus

Chorus (repeated)

"Heart of Oak" is neither a sea chanty nor a folk song but it is the official march of the Royal Navy (UK) and, since its origin, has been subjected to the folk process of oral-aural transmission. The music of "Heart of Oak" was composed by William Boyce, and the words were written by the 18th-century English actor David Garrick. "Heart of Oak" was originally written as part of an opera. It was first played publicly on New Year's Eve of 1760, sung by Samuel Thomas Champnes, one of Handel's soloists, as part of Garrick's pantomime "Harlequin's Invasion", at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. The "wonderful year" referenced in the first verse was 1759, during which British forces were victorious in several significant battles: the Battle of Minden on 1 August 1759, the Battle of Lagos on 19 August 1759, the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (outside Quebec City) on 13 September 1759, and the Battle of Quiberon Bay on 20 November 1759. (This battle foiled a French invasion project planned by the Duc de Choiseul to defeat Britain during the Seven Years' War, hence the reference in the song to 'flat-bottom' invasion barges.)

These victories were followed a few months later by the Battle of Wandiwash in India on 22 January 1760. Britain's continued success in the war boosted the song's popularity. The oak in the song's title refers to the wood from which British warships were generally made during the age of sail. The "Heart of oak" is the strongest central wood of the tree. The reference to "freemen not slaves" echoes the refrain ("Britons never will be slaves!") of Rule, Britannia!, written and composed two decades earlier.

I learned it from the **Burl Ives Songbook**.