

Changing our Tune by Robert G. Seidenstein - Philadelphia Inquirer

I used to think that Steve Goodman's "The City of New Orleans" should replace "The Star Spangled Banner" as the national anthem. Maybe you remember it.

Riding on The City of New Orleans  
Illinois Central Monday morning rail,  
15 cars and 15 restless riders,  
Three conductors and 25 sacks of mail.

Then the chorus:

Good morning, America,  
How are ya?  
Say don't you know me  
I'm your native son.  
I'm the train they call  
The City of New Orleans.  
Ill be gone 500 miles  
When the day is done.

The song's got a nice easy beat. Its got the word America in it. It's easy to sing. It's about traditions. It captures our national mania for movin' on. It's folksy. It makes us feel good. It's not based on a foreign tune. Other countries would think it's kind of nice if the United States had a song about a train - and not about a war - as its anthem. In short, it beats "The Banner" by a country mile.

The other day, however, I heard another song that qualifies for anthem status, and now Im torn between the two. How about John Fogerty's "Centerfield"? Talk about making you feel good.

Have you ever heard a more American song? Do you think they could have written a song like that in France? Its got a fresh New World feel, a tingling rhythm, and if it can't make America Numero Uno among the really cool countries in the world, I don't know what can.

A couple of other things: Its got audience participation in the form of clapping, Willie Mays and Joe DiMaggio for all Americans to unite behind, and the good old can-do spirit that made this country great:

Put me in coach.  
I'm ready to play(clap, clap, clap) today.  
Put me in coach.  
I'm ready to play today.  
Look at me,  
I can be  
Centerfield.

Centerfield. Not right, not left, but smack-dab in the middle. Plus, they already play it at ballparks. Another advantage: We wouldn't have to listen to opera has-beens trying to sing it.

There are other songs, of course, that deserve mention as national anthem possibilities. For example, there's "Truckin" by the Grateful Dead:

Arrows of neon and flashing marquees  
Out on Main Street.  
Chicago, New York, Detroit  
And it's all the same street.

The that great refrain:

Sometimes the light's all shining on me.  
Other times I can barely see.  
Lately it occurs to me.  
What a long, strange trip its been.

How's that for summing up more than 200 years of American history?

Then there's Aretha Franklin's "Freeway of Love". What a cruising song! (By the way, I disagree with all those who say that "Respect" should be the national anthem. We wouldn't need to ask for any respect if we had "Freeway of Love" as our national tune. We're talking Pink Cadillacs here. R-E-S-P-E-C-T, however, would make a fine national motto.

"Born to Run", "Louie, Louie", "Surfin U.S.A", "Sweet Little Sixteen", "Tutti-Frutti", "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" - this country's got it all.

Pretty soon, there'll be another Olympics. We need something better than "The Star Spangled Banner" after they award the gold medals. It's time to retire Francis Scott Key and really get down.