



Does the UN have a hymn or national anthem?

Though many songs have been written about the United Nations or on related themes, there is no official anthem or hymn for the Organization. One such song, or hymn, was written and performed at the United Nations on 24 October 1971, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the United Nations, by maestro Pablo Casals of Spain. The words were written by poet W.H. Auden of the United Kingdom.

The two, though they had never met, were brought together in this unusual collaboration by then United Nations Secretary-General U Thant. For centuries, poets and musicians have sung in praise of war and celebrated victories in battles. Mr. U Thant was intrigued by the fact that there existed no hymn to peace. Pablo Casals was a personal friend of his, and when approached by U Thant, he readily agreed to write the music. As the Secretary-General explained, the song was to be based on the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. Although it would not be formally adopted as the official anthem of the United Nations, U Thant hoped it would be performed on appropriate occasions.

While Casals greatly liked the ideas contained in the preamble, there was no way he could put music to such a document. The task to write an appropriate poem, based on the theme of peace and ideals enshrined in the preamble, fell on W.H. Auden, then regarded as the greatest living English poet. When a representative of the Secretary-General approached the poet, he immediately agreed to write the poem. In three days time, Auden finished writing *A hymn to the UN*, which was then set to music by Casals.

On 24 October 1971, the Orchestra of the Festival Casals, with the Maestro himself as conductor, presented the hymn in a premier performance at UN headquarters.

A Hymn to the UN Music: Pablo Casals Words: W. H. Auden

Eagerly, musician,
Sweep your string,
So we may sing.
Elated, optative,
Our several voices
Interblending,
Playfully contending,
Not interfering
But co-inhering,
For all within
The cincture
of the sound,
Is holy ground
Where all are brothers,
None faceless Others,
et mortals beware
Of words, for
With words we lie,
Can say peace

When we mean war,
Foul thought speak fair
And promise falsely,
But song is true:
Let music for peace
Be the paradigm,
For peace means to change At
the right time, as the World-
Clock
Goes Tick- and Tock.
So may the story
Of our human city
Presently move
Like music, when
Begotten notes
New notes beget
Making the flowing
Of time a growing
Till what it could be,

At last it is,
Where even sadness
Is a form of gladness,
Where fate is freedom,
Grace and Surprise.

This fact-sheet
has been issued
by the Public
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