

THE OLYMPIC HYMN THROUGHOUT THE GAMES

On the 5th April, 1986 in the Athens stadium, when for the first time in contemporary history, King George I of Greece pronounced the sacred words "I proclaim open the Games of the 1st Olympiad of the modern era", choirs began to sing the cantata, written by the Greek poet Costis PALAMAS and set to music by the gifted composer Spirou SAMARA. On the request of the Organizing Committee this presentation had been worked out so that it consisted of an unaccompanied chorus, taken up and backed by one or more military bands. Ten years later this work was heard again in the same surroundings on the occasion of the first and only Hellenic Games. It then sank into oblivion until 1960 when the International Olympic Committee adopted it as the official Olympic hymn. In the meantime other musical pieces composed and chosen either as a result of a competition or directly on demand, had the honour of being used as the Olympic hymn. Let us retrace briefly and chronologically the history of the Olympic hymn throughout the Games.

ATHENS Olympic hymn of SAMARA and PALAMAS
1896

In Paris as in Saint-Louis the Games were so drowned by the other exposition being held that they had neither pomp nor brilliance.

LONDON In spite of the trumpets of the Life Guards and the fanfares of the Grenadier Guards, as we see in one report "the music was forgotten beneath the blaring of brass and the familiar airs of male-voice choirs".

STOCKHOLM On the opening day, the 6th July, on the proclamation of King Gustav V (of Sweden) the Swedish choral association sang the national anthems. The athletes left the stadium to the sound of the triumphal Olympic March, by the Swedish composer H. ALEXANDERSSON, which had won the competition organized by the Swedish Olympic Committee.

ANVERS To the sound of Theban trumpets the Olympic Flag,
1920 inaugurated in Paris in June 1914, was hoisted
 for the first time ever throughout the history of
the Games. At the closing ceremony a cantata by Pierre
BENOIST was sung by a choir of 1200.

PARIS Two famous choirs, that of the Prague Teachers
1924 and the Crick-sicks of Tourcoing, accompanied by
 the bands of the Republican Guard, a colonial
regiment and various infantry regiments, took care of the
musical side of the opening ceremony. The French and Dutch
Olympic Flags were lowered to the sounds of the choir of
Auber's Hunting Lodge and the Hymn to France by Ambroise
THOMAS.

AMSTERDAM The choral organization was placed in the hands
1928 of the "Société Royale des Choeurs d'Hommes Apollo":
 1200 members out of eight societies. The Royal
Military Band and Royal Marine Band played the "WILT HEDEN
NU TRE DEN" by VALERIUS. After the opening speech the choir
sang "La chant du drapeau".

LOS ANGELES Bradley KEELER composed his Olympic hymn of the
1932 Los Angeles Games around the written text of
 Louis E. BENSON. This hymn was used again during
the Session of the International Olympic Committee in Vienna
in 1933. On this occasion new words were written in German
by Gustavus T. KIRBY.

BERLIN Dr. Richard STRAUSS himself led the musicians in
1936 their interpretation of his "March d'Homage". A
 competition was to decide which text would be
chosen. The poem by Wilhelm von SCHOLZ was placed first.
However, in the official report of the XIth Olympiad it is
stated that his composition was considered too "*national,*
although excellent from a poetic point of view". A second
competition met with incomparable success as 3000 manuscripts
were received. Out of the four which were picked out and
sent to STRAUSS he chose the work of Robert LUBAHM. During
the Winter Games, Richard STRAUSS invited the members of the
I.O.C. Executive Board to a reception when the hymn was sung
by an opera star from Munich accompanied by the master him-
self.

LONDON From 1946, the Committee for the Opening Ceremony
1948 presided over by Lord BURGHLEY, now the Marquess
 of EXETER, had suggested that they should adopt a
score that Roger QUILTER had conceived in 1936 out of the
famous "NON NOBIS DOMINE" of Rudyard KIPLING. Sir Malcolm

SARGENT, the amazing conductor, agreed to lead the musicians accompanying 1200 choristers.

HELSINKI It was again as the result of a competition that
1952 the elementary school teacher Jaako LINJAMA for
the musical side and Toivo LYY for the poem, saw
their composition adopted as the Olympic hymn of Helsinki.

MELBOURNE In 1954 the International Olympic Committee during
1956 its session in Athens took up the proposition of
Prince Pierre of MONACO and decided to open a
world-wide competition for the creation of a new version of
the Olympic hymn to the words of PINDARE. Some of the great-
est composers and music critics sat on the jury presided over
by Prince Pierre. For instance : Nadia BOULANGER (France),
Kazim AKSES (Turkey), Georges AURIC (France), Arthur BENJAMIN
(Australia), Viggo N. BENTZON (Denmark), Lennox BERKELEY
(Great Britain), Pablo CASALS (Spain), Aaron COPLAND (United
States), Ernesto HALFTER (Portugal), Frank MARTIN (Switzer-
land), Andrzej PANUFNIK (Poland), Alexandre de SPITZMULLER
(Austria). Having examined 392 scores presented by 40
countries, it was decided by 11 votes to 1 out of 12 that
the first prize should go to Michael SPISAK for an ultra-
modern atonal work. This hymn was heard for the first time
in Melbourne when it was sung by 2400 choristers. Afterwards
a great fuss was made between the Society of Authors' Rights
and the organizers of the Games. Therefore, Mrs. Anna
SAMARA, widow of the composer wrote to her cousin Jean KETSEAS,
member of the International Olympic Committee for Greece :
*"I declare that I make no claim to the authors' rights due
to me through inheritance, and I would be very happy if this
anthem were adopted as the international Olympic Hymn".*
(Athens, 2nd May 1957).

ROME In the Olympic stadium in Rome a special arrange-
1960 ment by Domenico FANTINI was used as a brass band
struck up the hymn, which has since been the
official Olympic hymn.

Let us also add that for the formal ceremonies
such as those for the medal presentations, an extract of the
hymn chosen by the Organizing Committee assured the musical
accompaniment for these moving moments. In the same way,
the official hymn rings out at every Session of the Inter-
national Olympic Committee.

Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN has very often insisted on the importance of the solemnities surrounding the Games which are a necessary part of the spirit of Olympism itself'. He has offered a great deal of advice on this subject, in the following :

“Great choral masses alternating with distant fanfares constitute the finest basis for the Olympic symphonies which the musicians of the future will no doubt compose. They will need some sort of co-operation from the architects. Acoustic problems are not solved by the fact of being out of doors. ‘Screens’ have an important part to play, and moreover it should not be forgotten that the invisibility of the performers was one of the innovating dogmas of Wagnerian aesthetics, a dogma which counts ever-more convinced adherents.”

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¹ We will be returning to this them in a forthcoming issue.