

# You're a Grand Old Flag

**"You're a Grand Old Flag"** is an American patriotic march. The song, a spirited march written by George M. Cohan, is a tribute to the U.S. flag. In addition to obvious references to the flag, it incorporates snippets of other popular songs, including one of his own. Cohan wrote it in 1906 for his stage musical *George Washington, Jr.*<sup>[1]</sup> The chorus is also used (with the words changed) as the team song for the Melbourne Football Club.

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## History

The song was first publicly performed on February 6, the play's opening night, at Herald Square Theater in New York City. "You're a Grand Old Flag" quickly became the first song from a musical to sell over a million copies of sheet music.<sup>[1]</sup> The title and first lyric comes from someone Cohan once met; the Library of Congress website notes. "You're a Grand Old Flag", would become one of the most popular American marching-band pieces of all time.

The original lyric for this perennial George M. Cohan favorite came, as Cohan later explained, from an encounter he had with a Civil War veteran who fought at Gettysburg. The two men found themselves next to each other and Cohan noticed the vet held a carefully folded but ragged old flag. The man reportedly then turned to Cohan and said, "She's a grand old rag." Cohan thought it was a great line and originally named his tune "You're a Grand Old Rag." So many groups and individuals objected to calling the flag a

### "You're a Grand Old Flag"



Cover of 1906 sheet music for "You're a Grand Old Flag".

#### Song

<b>Published</b>	1906
<b>Genre</b>	Patriotic, American march
<b>Songwriter(s)</b>	George M. Cohan

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MENU

Paul V. Yoder's arrangement of "You're a Grand Old Flag"'s chorus, as performed by a United States Army band.

"rag," however, that he "gave 'em what they wanted" and switched words, renaming the song "You're a Grand Old Flag".<sup>[1]</sup>

In the play itself, the scene with the Civil War soldier was replicated. The soldier's comment was the lead-in to this song. Thus, the first version of the chorus began, "You're a grand old rag / You're a high-flying flag". Despite Cohan's efforts to pull that version, some artists such as Billy Murray had recorded it under its original title, "The Grand Old Rag", in advance of the play's opening, and copies under that title still circulate among collectors. Cohan's second attempt at writing the chorus began, "You're a grand old flag / Though you're torn to a rag". The final version, with its redundant rhyme, is as shown below.

Today, many different arrangements of the song exist. In particular, Paul V. Yoder's arrangement of "You're a Grand Old Flag" is a version commonly used today by the U.S. military in its performances of the song.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

## Lyrics

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### Verse 1

There's a feeling comes a-stealing,  
And it sets my brain a-reeling,  
When I'm list'ning to the music of a military  
band.  
Any tune like "Yankee Doodle"  
Simply sets me off my noodle,  
It's that patriotic something that no one can  
understand.

"Way down South, in the land of cotton,"<sup>[N 1]</sup>  
Melody untiring,  
Ain't that inspiring?

Hurrah! We'll join the jubilee!<sup>[N 2]</sup>  
And that's going some, for the Yankees, by  
gum!<sup>[N 3]</sup>  
Red, White and Blue, I am for you!  
Honest, you're a grand old flag!

### Verse 2

I'm no cranky hanky panky,  
I'm a dead square, honest Yankee,  
And I'm mighty proud of that old flag that flies  
for Uncle Sam.  
Though I don't believe in raving  
Ev'ry time I see it waving,  
There's a chill runs up my back that makes me  
glad I'm what I am.

Here's a land with a million soldiers,  
That's if we should need 'em,  
We'll fight for freedom!

Hurrah! Hurrah! For ev'ry Yankee Tar,<sup>[N 4]</sup>  
And old G.A.R., ev'ry stripe, ev'ry star.  
Red, White and Blue, hats off to you!  
Honest, you're a grand old flag!

### Chorus

You're a grand old flag,  
You're a high-flying flag,  
And forever in peace may you wave.  
You're the emblem of the land I love,  
The home of the free and the brave.<sup>[N 5]</sup>  
Ev'ry heart beats true  
'Neath the Red, White and Blue,<sup>[N 6]</sup>  
Where there's never a boast or brag.

But should auld acquaintance be forgot,<sup>[N 7]</sup>  
Keep your eye on the grand old flag.

## Notes

1. Reference to "Dixie".
2. Reference to "Marching Through Georgia."
3. Line taken directly from the previous year's Cohan hit, "The Yankee Doodle Boy".
4. Old fashioned slang for a sailor, a.k.a. "Jack Tar". See tar.
5. Reference to "The Star-Spangled Banner."
6. Or "*Under Red, White and Blue*".
7. Reference to "Auld Lang Syne".

## Media

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## See also

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- "The Stars and Stripes Forever"
- Flag anthem

## References

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1. "You're a grand old flag [Song Collection]" (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ih/loc.natlib.ih/200000026/default.html>). Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress. Retrieved 19 Oct 2009.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiHHmTN-Rhc%20>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xpKWce44Bo>

## External links

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- 1906 sheet music (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cocoon/ih/loc.natlib.ih/100010512/default.html>) from the Library of Congress
- 1906 sheet music ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:George\\_M.\\_Cohan\\_You%27re\\_A\\_Grand\\_Old\\_Flag](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:George_M._Cohan_You%27re_A_Grand_Old_Flag)) available at Wikimedia Commons
- Billy Murray solo recording (as "The Grand Old Rag") ([https://archive.org/download/BillyMurray\\_part4/BillyMurray-TheGrandOldRag.mp3](https://archive.org/download/BillyMurray_part4/BillyMurray-TheGrandOldRag.mp3))
- Billy Murray and the American Quartet (as "You're a Grand Old Flag") ([https://archive.org/download/AmericanQuartetwithBillyMurray\\_part2/AmericanQuartetwithBillyMurray-YoureaGrandOldFlag.mp3](https://archive.org/download/AmericanQuartetwithBillyMurray_part2/AmericanQuartetwithBillyMurray-YoureaGrandOldFlag.mp3))

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