



The Music of Thanksgiving

When Abraham Lincoln became president, Thanksgiving was already a widely observed holiday in the United States, though its celebration varied across regions and over time. During the Civil War, both sides proclaimed days of Thanksgiving, asking God to bring a swift end to the war. In hopes of unifying the nation by requesting both sides set aside the day to acknowledge both the great hardships and blessings, President Lincoln declared a Federal Day of Thanksgiving, which we still celebrate today.

Importance of Music at the Time

Religion was deeply rooted in everyday life in the 1800s, making hymns among the most popular music at the time. Hymnals, for instance, sold very well in the decades before the Civil War and helped launch the American music industry. When the Thanksgiving holiday became official, it was appropriate to write a hymn to celebrate it.

What is a Hymn

A religious tune that is typically made up of repeating verses with a four-part harmony.

Listen

Click [here](#) to listen

Questions

- How has Thanksgiving changed in the last 160 years?
- Do you have any special Thanksgiving songs or traditions?
- How is this song different or similar to popular music today?

Activity

- Listen to the hymn.
- Clap or tap a short rhythm from the music (e.g., ta-ta-ti-ti-ta), and have students echo it.
- Ask students what they are thankful for and change the words to reflect their sentiments and sing their new version.

Reference

Click [here](#) to view sheet music with text, view [here](#) without text.