

Sooner Songs

LOVE of Alma Mater and pride in its athletic achievements have inspired the composition of dozens—perhaps scores—of school songs for the University of Oklahoma since the institution was established in 1892.

Many were born in a burst of enthusiasm; some were literary products of quiet contemplation and poetic imagination; still others have been conceived in sincere and loyal attempts to provide a thoroughly distinctive and appropriate song that might by common usage come to be an "official" song for the University.

This is a thing that cannot be legislated. There would be no point in having an official song that was never used. Each song as it is presented must meet the test of popular appeal and must rise or fall strictly on its merits.

In May, thirty years ago, some three hundred students gathered at chapel to adopt a song. A. Grant Evans, then president of the University, had offered a prize for the best school song. Nearly two-thirds of the students present voted for *Glad I Am a Sooner*, by Clarence W. Rose, sung to the tune of *Dixie*. How long did this last as the University song? Its fame, like that of most of the other O. U. songs, was fleeting.

A writer in the *Sooner Yearbook* for 1910 commented that "Enough songs have been written already to make a small book for ordinary use, but unfortunately none of them has been good enough to last." This writer added that "I do think, though, that one with the chorus, "Sing, sing, sing, ye college students," with words by Mr. Lysinger, a prize song, and original music by Mrs. J. W. Perry, is worthy of revival."

Probably the oldest song still in use is the one that goes:

Boomer, Sooner, Oklahoma
Boomer, Sooner, Okla U.
Hi Rickety Whoop te do
Boomer Sooner Okla U.
For the University of Oklahoma

This song was based on the University's first college yell, which consisted of repetition of the third and fourth lines in the song above.

Nearest thing to an "official" O. U. song in recent years has been *Boomer Sooner*, which goes, as all good Sooners know:

Four composers of recent O. U. songs are shown here. Jessie Lone Clarkson Gilkey, Joe W. Hicks and Caro Bond McDons are all Sooners. Gayle V. Grubb, lower left, is a Nebraska graduate but a Sooner by adoption.

O. U. Chant

Jessie L. Clarkson



CHEER OKLAHOMA

Words & Music by JOE HICKS Oklahoma '23



"A TOAST TO OKLAHOMA"

Caro Bond McDonald Mrs. J. W. Perry



HAIL TO OKLAHOMA

Words and Music by GAYLE GRUBB



Boomer Sooner, Boomer Sooner
 Boomer Sooner, Boomer Sooner;
 Oklahoma, Oklahoma
 Oklahoma, O. K. U.
 I'm a Sooner born, I'm a Sooner bred
 And when I die I'll be a Sooner dead.
 Rah Oklahoma, Rah Oklahoma, Rah Oklahoma!
 Oh by gum!

This song is sung to the tune of Yale University's *Boola Boola* song, a tune that has been appropriated by many a high school for local use. This lack of individuality in the tune, which is particularly noticeable when the tune is played without the words in a radio broadcast or on a foreign football field, has caused many loyal Sooners to urge the adoption of something more distinctive for the University of Oklahoma.

HOWEVER, this movement, like the famous proposal to change the name of Arkansas, has drawn some bitter opposition.

The *Short Grass Comments* department of the *Mangum Star* (a column ordinarily written by Carroll Elliott, '27), took a firm stand in behalf of O. U.'s present football pep song.

O. U. is reported running a temperature over selection of a song to replace the traditional *Boomer Sooner*, known to the thousands of graduates. A note from the University observes that many graduates "have criticized *Boomer Sooner* because the tune is a steal from the famous *Boola Boola* song of Yale." Maybe so, but the writer who asserts that *Boomer Sooner* is a steal is plainly unaware of conventions in this field. The tune is not a steal because *Boola Boola* never was copyrighted. Moreover, scores of school songs are adapted to the same tune. Even *Tin Pan Alley* finds it commercially profitable to "steal" the classics, and serious musicians don't object because the public for once will get to hear a well made ditty.

We are unhappy over the mistaken description of *Boomer Sooner* as a "steal." The song has been identified with University sports and activities far too long to take on a stigma of plagiarism this late in the day. *Boomer Sooner*, it is true, is not the type for group singing, and it is unfortunate in the matter of range, but none of the substitutes proffered is likely to become as well known or as emblematic of the O. U. campus as the lively *Boomer Sooner*, a lusty, rowdy ditty symbolizing the Oklahoma manner. We haven't heard any of the proposed substitutes, but we're willing to wager a crumpled hat that they are stodgy professionals, or trite harmonic sequences in the *Tin Pan Alley* style. *Boomer Sooner* is good enough, and if not, why not?

Neither the name of Arkansas nor *Boomer Sooner* seems in imminent danger of being changed, but nearly a half dozen new Sooner songs written in the last few years have attracted considerable attention.

The one that has been heard most widely, and in the opinion of the O. U. band has caught on with the public most strongly, is one that is really no competitor of *Boomer Sooner* because it is an entirely different type of song. This is *O. U. Chant*, by Jessie Lone Clarkson, '27fa, now Mrs. Boyd L. Gilkey of Chickasha.

This is a loyally song—an alma mater

song—with strength and dignity. The words go like this:

O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A!
 Our chant rolls on and on!
 Thousands strong
 Join heart and song
 In Alma Mater's praise—
 Of campus beautiful by day and night,
 Of colors proudly gleaming Red and White,
 'Neath a western sky
 O. U.'s chant will never die.
 Live on, University.

When a composition sung by University bandmen out in the middle of a huge football stadium can hold a crowd of twenty or thirty thousand persons silent and impressed for several minutes, it's "got something."

Mrs. Gilkey recently was asked by a music club group to tell the story of how she happened to write this song.

She explained that it was on the first-semester road trip of the Women's Choral Club in the year 1936-37, the year she first came to the University of Oklahoma fine arts faculty, that the girls challenged her to write a song for O. U.—the alma mater type—that would perhaps bring a tear to their eyes and put a lump in their throat and cause them to stand in reverence—instead of one that would start them jumping to their feet and yelling each time it was sung!

"What brought all this about might have been the fact that on this trip the choral club was scheduled at Southwestern State College at Weatherford. As I had been a member of the faculty there only the year before, we planned to open our concert with the singing of Southwestern's *Alma Mater Song*, as was the custom in that college—opening the curtain when the words of the chorus began. And really it was thrilling for both the singers and the audience, as the audience always stood and listened attentively and proudly and the singers would give their 'all' from the very beginning. It did something for all of us.

"Of course we had been rehearsing the *Alma Mater Song* along with our other music, our regular program. So when the big bus pulled out the morning of our trip with the thirty-five girls, did they sing *Boomer Sooner* as had always been the custom? No, they sang *Hail! All Hail to Thee, Southwestern Alma Mater True*—and they sang it continuously on the four-day trip, and it was the last song they sang as they arrived back in Norman.

"That was the year Christine Gilstrap Allen was president of the Choral Club and also a member of the Sooner Ladies Quartette. She, along with Genevieve Stout Palmer, Jean Schwartz Brady, the Davis sisters, Martha Jarrell Trindle and other members began again requesting me to write that type of song for O. U.

"So the night after the Pontiac Broadcast, when we were all bursting with pride for our Alma Mater, I decided on the

theme I would use for such a song. I would use the old chanting yell O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A as the theme.

"The next day I took what I had written to the quartette. It must not have been the proper day. Oh yes, it was Friday and that's always a bad day for anything other than social news—so Christine and the other gals said 'Uh-huh, yes, we think it is fine—' but that was all.

"So I forgot about the Alma Mater song until the next fall when the 1937-38 Women's Choral Club brought up the same old question. I told them I had written one for them the year before, but the quartette had turned me down flat. Well, the story goes that I brought it to the next meeting. The girls crowded around the piano. They learned it that day. They went after Mr. Ted Beard, the alumni secretary, to hear it. He immediately planned to use it on the KOCY broadcast that was coming up. I played it for Professor Richards the next day to get his opinion. He just grinned and said, 'Well, Jessie, if they like it they will sing it; if they don't, they won't. It's all right.' So Mr. Beard scheduled it to open and close the broadcast with Mr. Wehrend directing, the girls singing and the band playing.

"I immediately had my piano and harmony teacher of my grade school and high school days, Mr. R. Fred Burt, now superintendent of schools at Glenpool, go over it carefully. The girls used it that year to open all concerts, and the O. U. Band, 'Pride of Oklahoma,' has used it on numerous occasions.

OF course it was a thrill to direct the singing of the Choral Club and see the expression on the faces of the girls for they loved O. U. and the words of the song gave them an opportunity to sing its praises. And I have been happy that the University Band has used it on the nationwide broadcast at Miami, in state and Big Six broadcasts, and in the annual home concert last year. But this year, at the S. M. U. game, when the fellows started singing it, it came as such a surprise to me, and everyone around me in the Stadium was so quiet, and I knew so few people near me, that the closing words of the song—well, they just nearly got me! But I applauded along with all the S. M. U. crowd. It's always my luck to get mixed up with the opposing team's cheering section!"

O. U. Chant seems to be filling just the kind of place in Soonerland tradition that it was designed for.

Several of the other songs written recently for the University of Oklahoma were designed particularly to replace *Boomer Sooner*.

One of these is *Hail to Oklahoma*, written by Gayle V. Grubb, manager of WKY radio station at Oklahoma City. The

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Downtown Quarterbacks Club of Oklahoma City approached Mr. Grubb with a suggestion that his station sponsor a contest for a new O. U. football song. Mr. Grubb, being both a football enthusiast and a musician, decided to compose one himself.

"The first time I heard *Boomer Sooner*," he said, "I thought I was attending a Yale football game, and decided then I would attempt some time to write a song that would fit the University of Oklahoma and that school alone. So after eleven years I finished the song, which shows how quickly I do things!

"While I have written several popular songs in the past, I never attempted anything of this nature. I felt that if it could be used as a marching song, I would be well repaid for any effort on my part, and if it wasn't liked, then my feelings would still be very undamaged.

"I played and sang the song one night for the original Downtown Quarterbacks, and they insisted that it be presented publicly."

Mr. Grubb, incidentally, is a graduate of the University of Nebraska.

"I have been so close to the University of Oklahoma since living in Oklahoma City," he says, "that I have evidently been weaned somewhat. The folks back in Lincoln call me 'Benedict Arnold' Grubb."

The words to Mr. Grubb's song:

HAIL TO OKLAHOMA

Hail, Hail to Oklahoma,
Hail to old O. U.
It's always fight, fight, fight
For the red and white,
Watch our colors carry through—HEY!
Hail, Hail to Boomer Sooner,
No matter who the foe may be,
Down the field across the line
It's a touchdown
As we go marching to Victory.

Another new marching song is *O. K. Oklahoma*, written by the nationally famous orchestra leader and radio entertainer, Fred Waring. Mr. Waring wrote the Sooner song at the request of the staff of the *Covered Wagon*, student humor magazine. The song was presented over a national radio broadcast several times, and Mr. Waring gave a special preview concert for Sooner alumni in New York. He also sent the Alumni Office at the University a recording of the piece.

This song goes as follows:

O. K. Oklahoma
K. O. the foe today.
We say O. K. Oklahoma
The Sooners know the way. Ray!
S double O-N-E-R-S.
We'll win today or miss our guess.
O. K. Oklahoma.
K. O. the foe today.

CHORUS

We'll march down the field
With our heads held high.
Determined to win,
Any battle we're in.

We'll fight with all our might
For the red and white.
March On, March On, down the field
For a victory is nigh.
You know we came to win the game
For Oklahoma.
And so we will or know the reason why.

Caro Bond McDonald, '27ex, now Mrs. James R. McDonald of Chickasha, is author of *A Toast to Oklahoma*, which has been applauded enthusiastically each of the several times in which it has been presented to O. U. alumni groups.

While not exactly a marching song, this has a good swing to it.

A TOAST TO OKLAHOMA

Here's our toast to Oklahoma
Alma Mater of Sooners true.
With her colors bright,
Dear old red and white,
And alumni proud to honor you.
Oklahoma, we love to claim you,
From our hearts,
We sing this toast.
And from far or near,
Boomer Sooner we will cheer.
Here's our toast to old O. U.

Mrs. McDonald writes that the reason why she wrote *A Toast to Oklahoma* is still a big mystery to her.

"Life's greatest shock was when I began singing it, and I wondered what was happening to me," she said. "I thought it must surely be a 'steal' from some song I couldn't recall. Worst of all—I'm such an amateur musician I can't even play my own song!

"Love for O. U., enthusiasm over the football team, and hearing *Boola Boola* broadcast for Yale must have knotted up in my brain and presto—*A Toast to Oklahoma*."

A song that was inspired by a desire to replace *Boomer Sooner*, and which hit the O. U. campus immediately following the football season of 1938 is *Cheer Oklahoma*, written by Joe W. Hicks, '23, of Chicago, Illinois.

Mr. Hicks stumbled onto the theme for his song while playing impromptu piano sketches for his two small daughters one evening. Mrs. Hicks (Lois Marshall, '22 ex), liked the tune, and a friend who is a composer and publisher recommended that Mr. Hicks write words for it.

A limited number of copies were printed in professional sheet music form and distributed through the Alumni Office and University Band. *Cheer Oklahoma* has been presented in a number of radio programs, and to alumni groups.

CHEER OKLAHOMA

Indians and tom-toms, the oil wells and prairies
Have set a stage for Oklahoma's fame.
Its Boomers and Sooners
Its athletes and crooners
Have spread the news of Oklahoma's fame.

CHORUS

Oh here's to Boomer Soonerland
No better place can be found.
There is so much pep in our gang
As there is oil in our ground.
So watch our boys go, urge them on,
The way they fight sure is grand.
Now let's all join in song
And a cheer for each Oklahoma man.

Latest candidate to replace *Boomer Sooner* (the old song must have something to withstand so much competition) is *Oklahoma Drive*, by R. W. Hippen, '25, of Altus.

He writes in the familiar vein: "In common with practically every other real Sooner I have long resented the shameful lack of an O. U. song that is wholly ours."

Mr. Hippen proceeded to take the somewhat unusual step of searching for a truly appropriate and logical theme for his words, before worrying about details of his composition.

"We must have a song that can be known by everyone as our trademark," he writes. "Such a song should be simple and it should certainly reflect our principal trait or philosophy. Throughout the whole of our history our motivating force has been the spirit of the pioneers: the Sooners in their covered wagons; the urge to go onward; to advance in spite of all obstacles; in short—the urge to DRIVE. The result: our University, with every part of it, proudly stands out second to none.

"Since Dean Felgar and Guy Y. didn't force the necessity of a course in 'Design and Synthesis of Music' in the curriculum of the School of Chemical Engineering, I can't vouch for the mechanical excellence of my offering. However, the words are there and I can whistle the tune!"

OKLAHOMA DRIVE!

The finest country in the land;
'Neath the western sky,
Loyal sons and daughters all,
Shout the words on high.
The Covered Wagon still rolls on;
There's fire in every eye.
The grassy plains, the wooded hills,
Fling back our battle cry:

REFRAIN

On! Oklahoma!
Drive! Sooners! Drive!
All for the Red and White,
Let's show how we fight
With all our might;
So ever onward to victory
Drive! Sooners! Drive!
We never do give up—
We're Sooners until we die.

Of the recent Sooner songs, three are available in printed form. These are *O. K. Oklahoma*, published by Words and Music, Publishers, 1697 Broadway, New York; *Cheer Oklahoma*, published by George H. Moorhead, 127 North Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois; and *Hail to Oklahoma*, published by Trave-Taylor, Oklahoma City. The other songs are in manuscript form.



Indian paintings on tour

A traveling exhibition of seventy-five paintings by five Oklahoma Indian artists who attended the University of Oklahoma is being sent on a tour of the best art galleries of the United States.

The Indian artists are Woodrow Crumbo, Franklin Gritts, Acee Blue Eagle, Cecil Murdock, and Spencer Asiah.