

Revolution Songs

for Soprano, Violin, Cello, and Piano

March 7—April 30, 2026

Duration: about 18' for Eric Pritchard

In early March, 2026, my long-time collaborator Eric Pritchard asked me to arrange some Revolutionary War songs (and one from just before the Civil War) for soprano and piano trio. This was to be performed at Duke University at the end of May at a concert celebrating the 250th birthday of the US of A. Here are details about each song.

I. The Congress [4:20]

I thought I would get a start by setting pro-Tory lyrics by Jonathan Odell (1737-1818) to his song from 1776. Odell had a lot of fun publishing poems against the Revolution and in support of the Crown, and for his efforts had to flee to Nova Scotia and then to New Brunswick, as so many others did in those days. The original composition used the tune “Nancy Dawson”, which I didn’t use at all in this work; this is the only song in this cycle where the music is entirely my own.

II. Young Ladies In Town [2’]

In 1768, Bostonians refused to import commodities from Great Britain unless the import duties were repealed. The Boston News Letter published an anonymous poem asking young women to only wear American-made cloth (much like Gandhi would do to end the British Raj 140 years later). The melody used for this poem is a Scottish traditional tune frequently used for the song “Barbara Allen”. I’ve taken many liberties with the melody, and all the rest is my own.

III. The American Vicar of Bray [6']

This began with the 17th century folk melody “Country Gardens”, used in *The Quaker’s Opera* of 1728. “The Vicar of Bray” is a satire based on this tune about a vicar who switches sides repeatedly during changes in the Established Church through the reigns of several monarchs to keep his job. A parody of this parody, “The American Vicar of Bray”, with the same chorus, came out in Rivington’s Royal Gazette in 1779, poking fun at the shifting loyalties of some colonists during the war. This song, after my mutilation, is, therefore, a parody of a parody of a parody of a parody. The original is ten verses plus choruses; I have omitted two verses and only used the chorus three times. The penultimate verse uses the melody “Over the Stone”, a Welsh song composed after the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485.

IV. My Love Is Gone To Sea [2:30]

This song is from a collection of eight published in 1788, composed by Francis Hopkinson and dedicated to George Washington. Hopkinson was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and was an important figure in the Revolutionary War era. He was the first published American composer. I used the lyrics and (once again) took many liberties with the tune, with all else being my own.

V. The Union Forever [2:30]

John H. Hewitt published “The Union Forever” in 1850 to cheer on the anti-secession and anti-slavery factions in the decade before the Civil War. He used a tune from *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti. While this may seem out of place in a collection of Revolutionary War songs, the goal of the Revolution, one unified country free from foreign domination, only happened after the Civil War—when the United States became a singular, not plural, noun. All besides melody and lyrics is either mine or stolen from the best sources.

Music by Bill Robinson

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