

Oh Susanna!

START

G **A** **B** **D** **D** **E** **D** **B** **G** **A** **B** **B** **A** **G** **A**
Oh, I come from Al - a - bam - a with a banjo on my knee!

G **B** **D** **D** **E** **D** **B** **G** **A** **B** **B** **A** **A** **G**
Going to Lou - isi - an - a, my true love for to see.

G **A** **B** **D** **D** **E** **D** **B** **G** **A** **B** **B** **A** **G** **A**
It rain all night the day I left, the weather it was dry

G **B** **D** **D** **E** **D** **B** **G** **A** **B** **B** **A** **A** **G**
The sun so hot I froze to death, Susanna don't you cry

C **C** **E** **E** **E** **D** **D** **B** **G** **A** **G** **A** **B**
Oh Su - sanna! Oh don't you cry for me! For I come

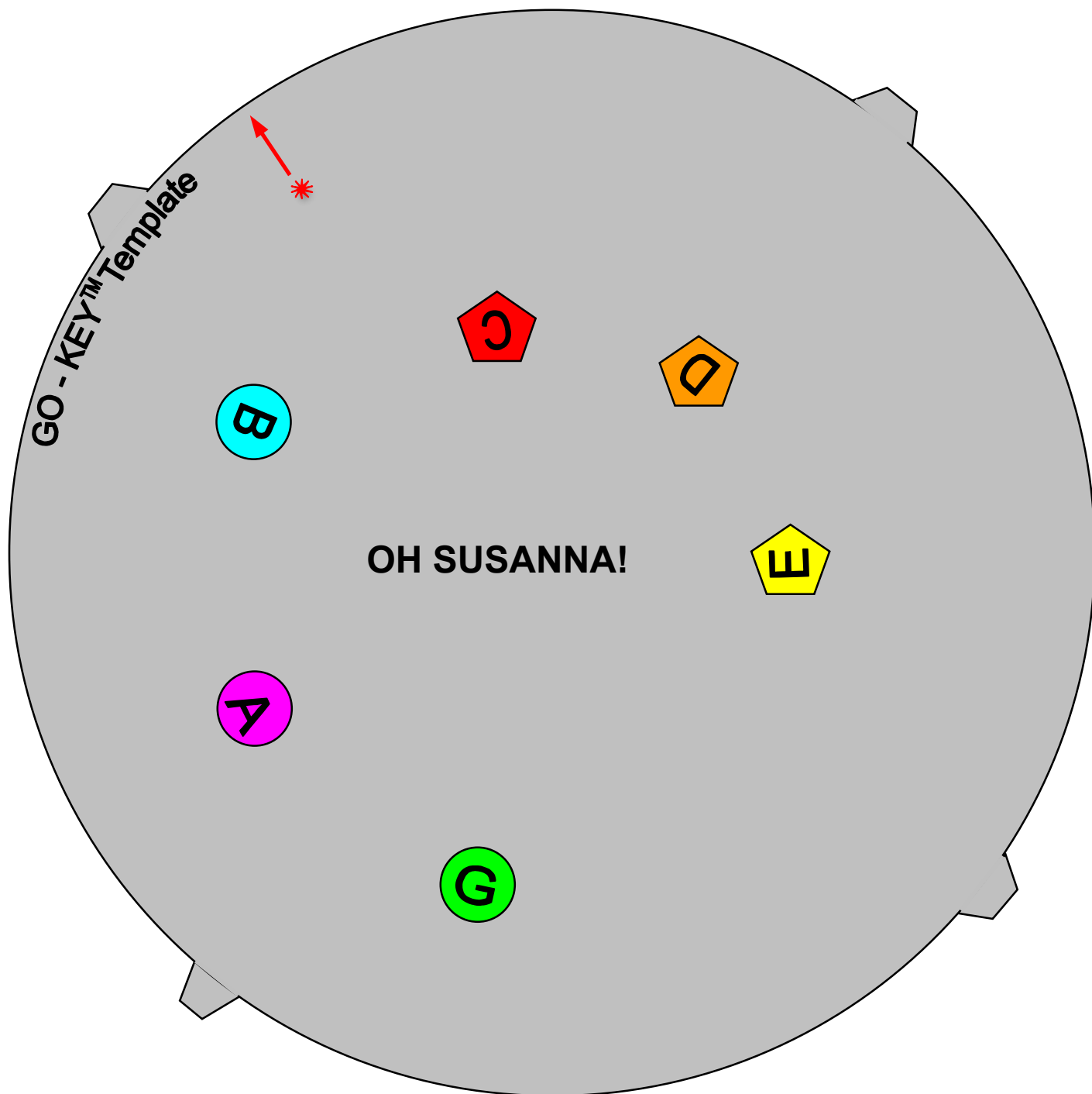
D **D** **E** **D** **B** **G** **A** **B** **B** **A** **A** **G** **END**
from Al - a - bam - a with a banjo on my knee!

Lyrics

Oh, I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee!
Going to Louisiana, my true love for to see
It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry
The sun so hot I froze to death, Susanna don't you cry
Oh Susanna! Oh don't you cry for me!
For I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee!

I had a dream the other night, when everything was still
I thought I saw Susanna dear a-comin' down the hill
A red red rose was in her hand, a tear was in her eye
I said I come from dixieland, Susanna don't you cry!
Oh Susanna! Oh, don't you cry for me!
For I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee

I soon will be in New Orleans, and then I'll look all around,
And when I find Susanna, I'll fall upon the ground.
But if I do not find her, then surely about to die,
And when I'm dead and buried—Susanna, don't you cry.
Oh Susanna! Oh, don't you cry for me!
For I come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee



History and Origin

"Oh! Susanna" is a minstrel song by Stephen Foster (1826–1864), first published in 1848. It is among the most popular American songs ever written. Members of the Western Writers of America chose it as one of the Top 100 Western songs of all time. In 1846, Stephen Foster moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and became a bookkeeper with his brother's steamship company. While in Cincinnati, Foster wrote "Oh! Susanna", possibly for his men's social club. The song was first performed by a local quintet at a concert in Andrews' Eagle Ice Cream Saloon in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on September 11, 1847. It was first published by W. C. Peters & Co. in Cincinnati in 1848. Blackface minstrel troupes performed the work, and, as was common at the time, many registered the song for copyright under their own names. As a result, it was copyrighted and published at least twenty-one times from February 25, 1848, through February 14, 1851. Foster earned just \$100 for the song, but its popularity led the publishing firm Firth, Pond & Company to offer him a royalty rate of two cents per copy of sheet music sold, convincing him to become the first fully professional songwriter in the United States.

The name Susanna may refer to Foster's deceased sister Charlotte, whose middle name was Susannah.

The song blends together a variety of musical traditions. The opening line refers to "a banjo on my knee", but the song takes its beat from the polka, which had just reached the U.S. from Europe. Writer and musician Glenn Weiser suggests that the song incorporates elements of two previous compositions, both published in 1846: "Mary Blane," by Billy Whitlock, and "Rose of Alabama," by Silas S. Steele. He points out that the melody of the verse of "Oh! Susanna" resembles that of "Mary Blane," and the opening of the chorus of "Oh! Susanna" is almost identical to that of "Rose of Alabama." Moreover, the story lines of both "Oh! Susanna" and "The Rose of Alabama" involve a lover going from one Deep Southern state to another with his banjo in search of his sweetheart, which suggests that Foster got the inspiration for his lyrics from Steele's song.

The lyrics are largely nonsense, as characterized by lines such as "It rain'd all night the day I left, The weather it was dry, The sun so hot I froze to death..." (first verse) and "I shut my eyes to hold my breath..." (second verse).

Popularity and Adaptations

The song is not only one of Stephen Foster's best-known songs, but also one of the best-known American songs. No American song had sold more than 5,000 copies before; "Oh! Susanna" sold over 100,000. After its publication, it quickly became known as an "unofficial theme of the Forty-Niners", with new lyrics about traveling to California with a "washpan on my knee".

- A 1955 novelty recording of the song by The Singing Dogs reached #22 on the US Billboard Pop Singles chart.
- A humorous recording of "Oh! Susanna" was on the second album by The Byrds, *Turn! Turn! Turn!*, in 1965.
- Bing Crosby included the song in a medley on his album *101 Gang Songs* (1961).
- James Taylor also included a version of the song on his second album, *Sweet Baby James*, in 1970.
- The alt-folk music group The Be Good Tanyas recorded an adaptation of Oh Susana on their 2000 album "Blue Horse".
- The song was parodied in The Simpsons episode "The Old Blue Mayor She Ain't What She Used to Be".