

Lyrics

As with many numbers with long traditional folk use, there is no one "official" version of the song or its lyrics. This extends so far as confusion as to its name, with it often being mistakenly called "When the Saints Come Marching In". As for the lyrics themselves, their very simplicity makes it easy to generate new verses. Since the first and second lines of a verse are exactly the same, and the third and fourth are standard throughout, the creation of one suitable line in iambic tetrameter generates an entire verse.

Common Standard Lyrics

Oh, when the saints go marching in
 Oh, when the saints go marching in
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

Oh, when the horsemen begin to ride
 Oh, when the horsemen begin to ride
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

Oh, when the drums begin to bang
 Oh, when the drums begin to bang
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

Oh, when the fire begins to blaze
 Oh, when the fire begins to blaze
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

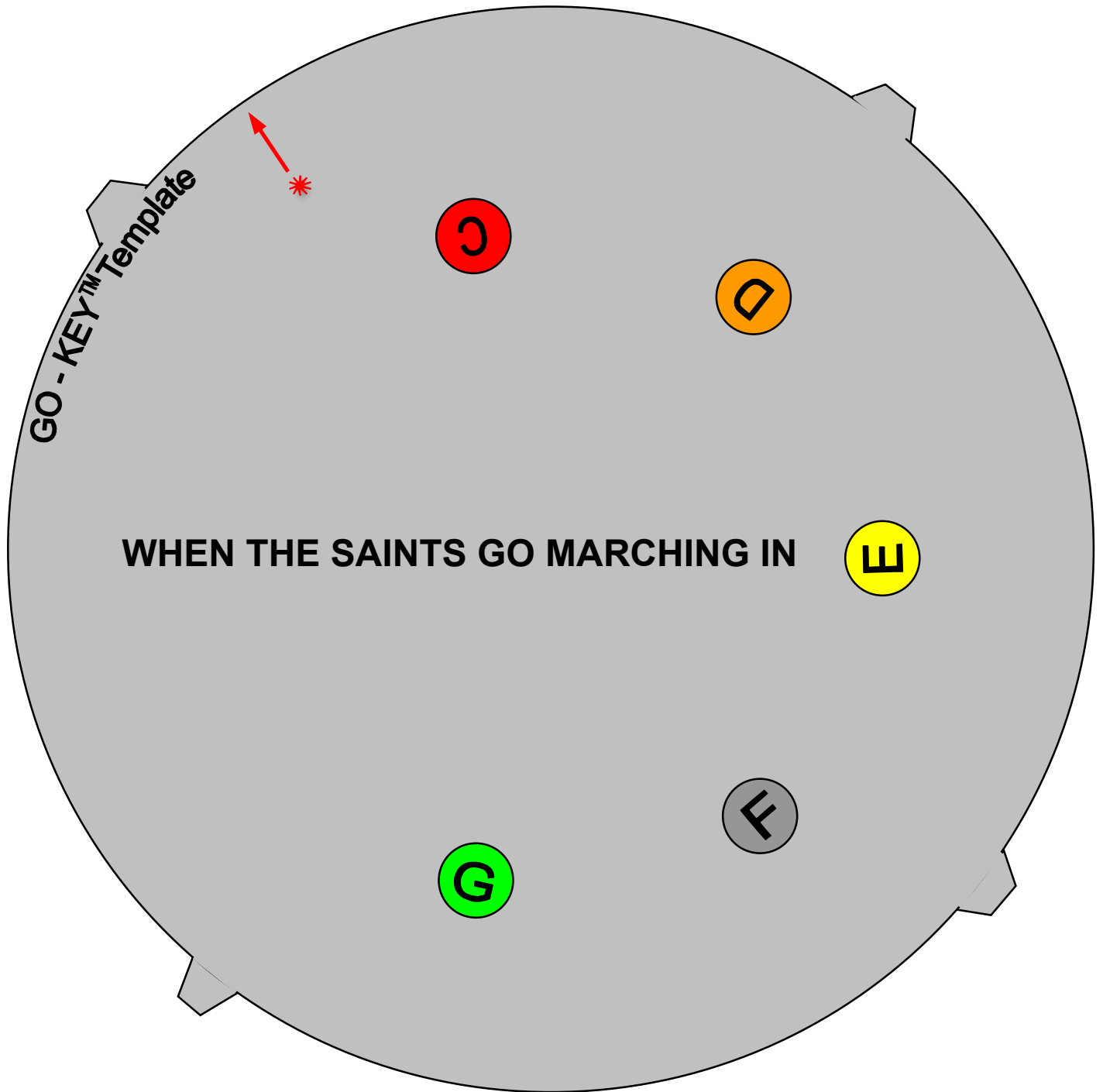
Oh, when the stars fall from the sky
 Oh, when the stars fall from the sky
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

Oh, brother Charles you are my friend
 Oh, brother Charles you are my friend
 Yea, you gonna be in that number
 When the saints go marching in.

Oh, when the moon turns red with blood
 Oh, when the moon turns red with blood
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

Oh, when the saints go marching in
 Oh, when the saints go marching in
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in

Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call
 Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call
 Oh Lord I want to be in that number
 When the saints go marching in



History and Origin

"When the Saints Go Marching In", often referred to as "The Saints", is a Black spiritual. Though it originated as a Christian hymn, it is often played by jazz bands. This song was famously recorded on May 13, 1938, by Louis Armstrong and his orchestra. The song is sometimes confused with a similarly titled composition "When the Saints Are Marching In" from 1896 by Katharine Purvis (lyrics) and James Milton Black (music).

The origins of this song are unclear. It apparently evolved in the early 1900s from a number of similarly titled gospel songs, including "When the Saints Are Marching In" (1896) and "When the Saints March In for Crowning" (1908). The first known recorded version was in 1923 by the Paramount Jubilee Singers on Paramount 12073. Although the title given on the label is "When All the Saints Come Marching In", the group sings the modern lyrics beginning with "When the saints go marching in". No author is shown on the label. Several other gospel versions were recorded in the 1920s, with slightly varying titles but using the same lyrics, including versions by The Four Harmony Kings (1924), Elkins-Payne Jubilee Singers (1924), Wheat Street Female Quartet (1925), Bo Weavil Jackson (1926), Deaconess Alexander (1926), Rev. E. D. Campbell (1927), Robert Hicks (AKA Barbecue Bob, 1927), Blind Willie Davis (1928), and the Pace Jubilee Singers (1928).

The earliest versions were slow and stately, but as time passed the recordings became more rhythmic, including a distinctly uptempo version by the Sanctified Singers on British Parlophone in 1931. Even though the song had folk roots, a number of composers claimed copyright in it in later years, including Luther G. Presley and Virgil Oliver Stamps, R. E. Winsett, and Frank and Jim McCravy. Although the song is still heard as a slow spiritual number, since the mid-20th century it has been more commonly performed as a "hot" number. The tune is particularly associated with the city of New Orleans. A jazz standard, it has been recorded by a great many jazz and pop artists.

Both vocal and instrumental renditions of the song abound. Louis Armstrong was one of the first to make the tune into a nationally known pop melody in the late 1930s. Armstrong wrote that his sister told him she thought the secular performance style of the traditional church tune was inappropriate and irreligious. Armstrong was in a New Orleans tradition of turning church numbers into brass band and dance.

As gospel hymn

- First recorded by the Paramount Jubilee Singers on Paramount 12073, mid-November 1923.
- Four Harmony Kings, Vocalion 14941, mid-November 1924.
- Elkins-Payne Jubilee Singers, Okeh 8170. c.November 24, 1924.
- Bo Weavil Jackson, c. August 1926 in Chicago, IL, under the title "When the Saints Come Marching Home", Paramount 12390
- Recorded by bluesman Sleepy John Estes accompanied by second guitar and kazoo for Bluebird Records in Chicago, 1941
- This song is available in the Elvis Presley compilation Peace in the Valley: The Complete Gospel Recordings. Sony BMG/Elvis Music

With traditional lyrics

- Louis Armstrong helped make The Saints into a jazz standard with his 1938 Decca recording.
- The tune was brought into the early rock and roll repertoire by Fats Domino as one of the traditional New Orleans numbers.
- Judy Garland sang it in her own pop style.
- Elvis Presley performed the song during the Million Dollar Quartet jam session and also recorded a version for his film, Frankie and Johnny.
- Bing Crosby included the song in a medley on his album 101 Gang Songs (1961)
- Early rock artists to follow Domino's lead included Jerry Lee Lewis and Tony Sheridan (featuring then-unknown band The Beatles as a backing group).
- In 1990, John Rutter arranged a lively version of the song for the Cambridge Singers.
- Etta James performed the song during the 1984 Summer Olympics opening ceremony.

Television

The children's television show *Barney & Friends* has a song called "Walk Across the Street" sung to this tune. In an episode of the animated series, *Dexter's Laboratory*, a barbershop quartet sings this song.