The Public Advertiser (London), 27 February 1792

The Southern Provinces of France exhibit scenes the most wretched. Anarchy is prevalent throughout them, and whatever may be said to the contrary, the affairs of that once flourishing country have now evidently fallen into a state of the most extreme wretchedness and ruin.

In his memoirs, Chaumette describes the arrival of the fédérés delegation from Marseille at the end of July. This was particularly important as the Marseillais were renowned republicans, and would play a major part in the overthrow of the king in the journée of 10 August.

The good Marseillais fédérés arrived in Paris on 30 July. The arrival of the Marseillais was the signal for great rejoicing by the patriots, who had been oppressed for so long. All the most faithful friends of liberty rushed to see them march past. It seemed as if this battalion, famous for its exploits in the south of France, was bringing with it the lightning which was going to strike tyranny dead. I can almost see them still, with their tanned, soldierly faces, marching in tight formation, responding to our welcome with cries of Vive la liberté!

For the whole length of their march, the Marseillais made the streets of Paris ring with the song which has become so dear to all French people: Allons, enfants de la patrie, etc.

The newspaper La Chronique du Roi evoked the birth of the ‘Marseillaise’.

In all the theatres at the moment you hear people asking for the song: Allons, enfants de la patrie! The words are by M. Rouget de Lisle, a captain in the engineering corps, garrisoned at Huingue. The tune was composed by Allemand for one of our armies, and is both moving and warlike.

The song came with the fédérés from Marseille, where it was all the rage. They sing it very harmoniously, and when they get to the bit where they wave their hats and swords in the air and all shout together, Aux armes, citoyens!, it really sends a shiver down the spine. These latter-day bards have spread this martial air in all the villages they passed through, and in this way have inspired the rural areas with civic and warlike feelings. They often sing it at the Palais-Royal, sometimes during shows in the interval between the two plays.

The Marseillaise

Strasbourg, not Marseille, first heard ‘La Marseillaise’. This stirring martial music first aroused the enthusiasm of French men and women on 25 April 1792, in what was then a frontier town in the week-old war with Germany and Austria. Originally known as the ‘War Song of the Army of the Rhine’, it was written by Rouget de Lisle, an army engineer, and sung by Dietrich, mayor of Strasbourg, in his fine tenor voice.

An amateur composer and poet, and author of a ‘Hymn to Liberty’, Rouget de Lisle was inspired by the songs which expressed the people’s determination to defend the Revolution. The rough music of the Carmagnole, with words threatening death and destruction to all, including the king and queen, who blocked the people’s advance was an example. The Ça ira achieved an electrifying effect through its reiterated refrain ‘Ça ira’—equality would reign at last. Such songs were not for the faint-hearted or the uncommitted.

The ‘Marseillaise’ was influenced by the works of the composer Gossec in its use of large choirs and wind instruments, which made so profound an impression at open-air festivals, and also by the sprightly marches written for the National Guard. Above all, it was a call to arms. Carried from Strasbourg to the Midi, it was brought to Paris by the Marseillais fédérés—the ‘six hundred men who know how to die’—who stormed the Tuileries on 10 August 1792. In every village on the long, hot journey from Marseille to the capital, Aux armes, citoyens! had resounded as the Marseillais waved their hats and brandished their swords in terrifying unison.

From the Paris insurrection—and from the streets and theatres of provincial France—the ‘Marseillaise’ passed to the army. Sung at Valmy on 20 September 1792 in celebration of France’s victory over Prussia, it became the music of the clash of swords and the roar of cannons, accompanying French troops on their campaigns across Europe. Carnot, the member of the great Committee for Public Safety of 1793–4 with responsibility for military organization, boasted that it added a hundred thousand soldiers to the nation’s armies.

The ‘Marseillaise’ was adopted as France’s official anthem in 1795, after the Terror, despite strong competition from Le Réveil du Peuple (The Re-awakening of the People), a counter-revolutionary song against extremist Jacobins. Napoleon, mistrustful of popular fervour, allowed it to fall into disuse, and the
Bourbons banned it when they returned to the throne in 1815.

During the revolutionary upheavals of 1830, 1848 and 1870–1 the 'Marseillaise' reappeared as a symbol of republicanism, a conception represented by Delacroix’s famous painting *Liberty singing the Marseillaise* on the

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*A songsheet of the 'Marseillaise'; with singing troops.*

**barricades and calling the people to the battle of July (1830).**

It was 1879 before the 'Marseillaise' became France’s national anthem, as a pledge to the permanence of the republic and its values.