

## INTRODUCTION

The White House is best known as the office and home of the President of the United States. But it also serves as a stage for American arts and culture—especially music. From President John Adams, the White House’s first resident, to modern day presidents, musical performances of all kinds have enhanced life in the White House. Learn about the connection between the White House and the United States Marine Band, the inspiration behind the song “Hail to the Chief,” and more by exploring the rich history of music at the White House.

## CONTEXTUAL ESSAY



*Image 2. Photograph of President George H.W. Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush standing with the U.S. Marine Band in the East Room. The room is decorated for the holidays (1990).*

In 1798, Congress passed legislation that created the United States Marine Band. In 1801, just two months after moving into the newly constructed White House, President John Adams invited the Marine Band to play at a New Year’s Day reception. The Marine Band is the oldest professional musical organization in the United States and is known as “The President’s Own” because of its association with the president of the United States and the White House. The Marine

Band was the first musical organization to perform at the White House and President Adams’ 1801 reception began a long tradition of Marine Band performances at the White House that continues today. View **Image 1**, in the chart below, to see a photograph of crowds listening to the U.S. Marine Band on the South Lawn in 1921. **Image 2**, above, features President George H.W. Bush and First Lady Barbara Bush standing with the U.S. Marine Band at the White House in 1990.

In 1806, President Thomas Jefferson invited the Marine Band to perform at the White House for the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations. The band played the song “To Anacreon in Heaven,” also known as “The

Anacreontic Song,” which was a popular song sung in musical and social clubs. While the name of this song may be unfamiliar, the music is very recognizable to most Americans today. During the War of 1812, Francis Scott Key penned the poem “Defense of Fort McHenry.” In combining those words with the tune from “To Anacreon in Heaven,” “The Star-Spangled Banner” was born. Refer to **Image 3**, in the chart, to see an autographed manuscript of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” In 1931, President Herbert Hoover made the song the United States’ official national anthem.

In 1810, First Lady Dolley Madison purchased a piano and a collection of music to provide entertainment for guests at the White House. The volume, titled “Journal of Musick,” was published by Charlotte Le Pelletier. **Image 4**, to the right, is a photograph of a copy of the collection of music First Lady Dolley Madison purchased. The piano and the original edition of the music were destroyed when the British set fire to the White House during the War of 1812.



*Image 4. Copy of the volume of music First Lady Dolley Madison purchased in 1810.*

Another song with historical origins and a strong connection to the White House is “Hail to the Chief.” The song was from the popular musical *The Lady of the Lake* by Sir Walter Scott. The Marine Band first performed the song for President Andrew Jackson’s entrance during a ceremony for the start of the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, located in the District of Columbia, on May 28, 1829. First Lady Julia Tyler and First Lady Sarah Polk also played the song when the president arrived at events. In 1954, the Department of Defense made “Hail to the Chief” an official tribute to the President of the United States.

African-American concert pianist Thomas Green Bethune performed for President James Buchanan in 1860. Referred to as “Blind Tom,” Bethune was enslaved, blind, and just eleven years old when he played at the White House. Larooqua, a Native American musician, performed at the White House

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during President Abraham Lincoln’s administration (1861-1865). John Philip Sousa, however, was one of the most well-known White House musicians of the late 1800s—seen in **Image 5**, below. Sousa served as the Director of the Marine Band from 1880 to 1892. During his time as director, Sousa brought “The President’s Own” to new heights. He held very strict rehearsals, changed the instruments in use, and started the band’s first national tour.



*Image 5. Photograph of John Philip Sousa at the White House (1924).*

Steinway & Sons, a piano company, gifted a golden grand piano to President Theodore Roosevelt and the White House in 1903. The piano was placed in the newly redecorated East Room. See the gold grand piano in the East Room during the Calvin Coolidge administration in **Image 6**, in the chart below. Famous pianists including Josef Hofmann and Ignacy Paderewski were invited to perform for the Roosevelts, using the 1903 Steinway piano. In 1938, Steinway & Sons replaced the 1903 gold piano with a new piano that is still used in the White House today. See the 1938 replacement piano and bench in **Image 7**, in the chart below. **Image 8**, also in the chart, pictures President Richard Nixon and D.C. native Duke Ellington playing “Happy Birthday” on the 1938 piano in the East Room of the White House to honor Ellington’s seventieth birthday in 1969.

While music was often a source of entertainment at the White House, it also carries greater social and political implications. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to let African-American singer Marian Anderson perform in Constitution Hall—located just a few blocks from the White House—due to her race. Upon hearing this news, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned her membership to the DAR and worked with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to arrange for Anderson to give a concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. A few months later, Mrs. Roosevelt invited Anderson to sing for the British Royals at the White House despite bitter criticism

from segregationists. In this case, the White House used its power to influence music and combat racial injustice.



*Image 13. Photograph of Vladimir Horowitz, Ukrainian classical pianist and composer, at the end of his concert in the East Room on February 16, 1978. He performed for President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter.*

Although President Dwight Eisenhower and First Lady Mamie Eisenhower invited Broadway musical theater into the White House for the first time in 1958, music and the performing arts were center stage in the Kennedy White House in the 1960s. President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy invited the media to White House cultural events and assigned federal funding to the arts and humanities. Performing arts organizations including the Metropolitan

Opera Studio, the American Ballet Theater, the New York City Center Light Opera Company, and many others performed at the White House during the Kennedy administration. **Image 9**, in the chart, shows the National Symphony Orchestra president and its director presenting First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy with season passes. **Image 10**, also in the chart, pictures President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jackie Kennedy with Spanish and Puerto Rican cellist Pablo Casals in the East Room. The photograph was taken after a State Dinner in honor of Governor Luis Munoz of Puerto Rico and his wife, Ines Mendoza de Munoz, in 1961.

The White House during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations featured many types of music including jazz, gospel, ragtime, classical concerts, and vocal forms. To celebrate the 238<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Washington's birthday in 1970, President and Mrs. Nixon invited guests to a performance of *1776* at the White House—a Broadway show about the creation of the Declaration of Independence. Refer to **Images 11 and 12** in the chart to see photographs of the performance in the East Room of the White House.



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In 1978, President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter worked with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) to produce a series of five-hour performing arts programs for television called “In Performance at the White House.” Broadcast across the United States and Europe, the program provided public access to White House music and featured performances by many American and European musicians and dancers including Vladimir Horowitz, Leontyne Price, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Patricia McBride, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Andres Segovia. **Image 13**, above, features a photograph of classical pianist Vladimir Horowitz at the end of his concert in the East Room in 1978. The Reagan administration continued the PBS programs from the White House and held outdoor concerts featuring the Boston Pops Orchestra and the Beach Boys. Artists like Frank Sinatra, Jesse Norman, and Lionel Hampton also performed concerts during state visits to the White House.

Today, presidents and firsts ladies continue the “In Performance at the White House” series and many other musical traditions at the White House. In 2001, President George W. Bush made the month of June “Black Music Month” and encouraged Americans “to learn more about the contributions of Black artists to America’s musical heritage and to celebrate their remarkable role in shaping our history and culture.” In 2009, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama hosted a celebration



*Image 15. First Lady Michelle Obama speaking at a workshop for local high school students with the cast of “Hamilton” in the State Dining Room. Present at the event (from left to right) were Lin-Manuel Miranda, Daveed Diggs, Christopher Jackson, and Phillipa Soo (2016).*

of Stevie Wonder’s music and Festiva Latina—a concert celebrating Hispanic music and culture. **Image 14**, in the chart, is a photograph of American musician and singer Stevie Wonder performing at the White House. In 2016, President Obama invited the cast of the musical *Hamilton* to the White House—a show about the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. **Image 15**, above, shows First Lady Michelle Obama speaking at a workshop for local high school students with the cast of *Hamilton* in the State Dining Room. Presidents continue to invite musicians and other performers



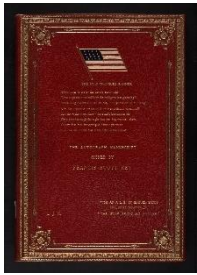

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to the White House for events, state visits, and special occasions, carrying on the long history of music and the White House that began with its first resident, John Adams.

## IMAGES






*Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing*

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	U.S. Marine Band Concert	1921	Unknown	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1112730.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1112730.tif.info</a>
2	George and Barbara Bush Pose with the U.S. Marine Band in the East Room	1990	Unknown	George Bush Presidential Library and Museum/NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/George%20H%20W%20Bush/4183.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/George%20H%20W%20Bush/4183.tif.info</a>
3	The Star-Spangled Banner – Autographed Manuscript	1840	Francis Scott Key	Library of Congress		<a href="https://www.loc.gov/resource/ih.as.100000019.0?st=gallery">https://www.loc.gov/resource/ih.as.100000019.0?st=gallery</a>
4	Journal of Musick	1810	Charlotte Le Pelletier	Library of Congress		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/James%20Madison/1113329.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/James%20Madison/1113329.tif.info</a>

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5	John Phillip Sousa, at White House	1924	Harris & Ewing	Library of Congress		<a href="https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013014034/">https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013014034/</a>
6	East Room, Calvin Coolidge Administration	1928	Ralph Waldo Magee	White House		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/4014.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/4014.tif.info</a>
7	Piano and Bench	Unknown	Steinway & Sons	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/836.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Rooms/836.tif.info</a>
8	Nixon at Piano in East Room	1969	Unknown	Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Richard%20Nixon/4859.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Richard%20Nixon/4859.tif.info</a>
9	Jacqueline Kennedy Presented with a National Symphony Orchestra Pass	1961	Robert L. Knudsen	John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/1112134.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/1112134.tif.info</a>
10	The Kennedys at Pablo Casals Concert	1961	Unknown	John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/1559.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/John%20F%20Kennedy/1559.jpg.info</a>

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11	Performance of "1776" in East Room	1970	James E. Russell	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113362.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113362.tif.info</a>
12	Performance of "1776" in East Room	1970	James E. Russell	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113358.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/1113358.tif.info</a>
13	Vladimir Horowitz After His Afternoon Concert in the East Room	1978	Karl Schumacher	Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum/NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/4699.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/4699.tif.info</a>
14	Stevie Wonder Performs at the White House	1998	White House Photo Office	William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum/NARA		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/4057.tif.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Events/4057.tif.info</a>
15	Michelle Obama Introduces the Cast of "Hamilton"	2016	Matthew D'Agostino	White House Historical Association		<a href="https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/Events/1129268.jpg.info">https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital-Library/Main%20Index/Events/1129268.jpg.info</a>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Collection: "The President's Own" by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Collection: "Music in the White House" by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)



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- Podcast: *The White House 1600 Sessions: The President's Own: The Marine Band and the White House* by the White House Historical Association. [Listen here.](#)
- Video: "President Obama Opens White House Evening of Classical Music." [Click here.](#)
- Website: Public Broadcasting Channel's "In Performance at the White House." [Click here.](#)

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

### For all learners:

- Explore the "Music and Musical Performances in the White House Timeline" by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#) Or visit PBS's "In Performance at the White House" page to see musical performances at the White House in recent years. [Click here.](#)
- Listen to some of the music mentioned in the contextual essay! [Click here](#) to hear the U.S. Marine Band play "Hail to the Chief." [Click here](#) to watch a video of the U.S. Marine Band playing the "Star Spangled Banner."

### For older learners:

- The national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," is over 200 years old. Should the United States adopt a new national anthem? Why or why not? Write a persuasive essay arguing for your position.
- Use the contextual essay or conduct further research to find examples of musical performances at the White House. Consider the role of historical events, wars, or international situations in determining which musical guests are invited to the White House.
- Choose a president and research their connection to music. What styles of music were popular during their term(s) in office? Discuss your findings with a classmate, family member, or friend.

### For younger learners:

- Use art to explore the way music from the United States Marine Band makes you feel with the "Musical Art" Anywhere Activity. [Click here.](#)