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Searching for new National Anthem

X-Factor style contest to replace "boring" Swiss national anthem

Likened to a weather forecast crossed with a church hymn, Switzerland's national anthem could be binned in favour of a new version if campaigners get their way. Too heavy on God and Alpine vistas, the anthem fails to reflect today's values and has never been etched into the national psyche, critics say.

"Nobody knows the words! Anyone who tells you they do is a liar. Or else we manage the first few and afterwards we go 'la, la, la,'" said Pierre Kohler, president of the jury holding an unofficial competition to choose a new anthem.



On January 1, organisers kicked off a contest to find a new anthem, open to all and with a first prize of 10,000 Swiss francs.

The current anthem, officially called the "Swiss Psalm", was penned in 1841, setting a poem on piety and Alpine climes to music composed by a priest. "You've got rolling thunder, radiant mountains. It's a mix between a weather report and a psalm. That might have been right for its century," said fellow jury president Oscar Knapp.

Its de facto song was "When you call us, Fatherland", written in 1811. But that shared a tune with Britain's "God Save the Queen", a tune once common in many countries and still used by Switzerland's tiny neighbour Liechtenstein. This created a few awkward situations.

"Swiss Psalm" supporters pushed from the late 19th century to make it the official anthem and end confusion with Britain's, but decision-making can move at snail's pace to build consensus. In 1961, the government declared The "Swiss Psalm" the provisional anthem, before giving it official status in 1981.

The problem, opponents argue, is that it was outdated already five decades ago, given Switzerland's increasingly secular society. "We don't take issue with the tune, which is quite beautiful," said Jean-Daniel Gerber, chairman of the Swiss Society for Public Good, the 203-year-old association which masterminded the competition. "The problem is the lyrics".

The author had in mind a psalm, not a national anthem. As a psalm, you have to admit that it's very good. We have no qualms with it as a psalm, just as an anthem," he added.

The jury includes establishment figures - Kohler is a former cantonal government chief and Knapp an ex-ambassador - as well as musicians, journalists and representatives of choirs, yodel clubs and sports associations.

Entries must be submitted by June 30, in at least one of the four languages, with the organisers handling subsequent translation. The competition rules say the current tune should be respected, albeit with room for artistic licence.

By Tanja Latham-Zurbruegg

Consigli della Nonna

1. If you are baking cakes or cookies and discover that someone used the last of the eggs in the fridge, did you know that you can use vinegar instead? Just use one tablespoon of white distilled vinegar plus one teaspoon of baking soda to replace each egg in any cake recipe. And no, your cake won't taste of vinegar.
2. Buttermilk is a common ingredient in baking. If you don't have any, add a tablespoon of vinegar to a cupful of whole milk, then let it stand for five minutes.

By Ursula Nixon



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