



## Songs

# O CANADA

**(BIOGRAPHY)** The composer, pianist, conductor, teacher and administrator CALIXA LAVALLÉE (1842-1891), was one of Canada's most active and versatile musicians of his day. His career eventually took him to Boston, where he remained until his death. **(BACK-**

**GROUND)** Written in 1880 in Quebec City on the occasion of the Fête nationale des Canadiens-français, "O Canada" was approved by the Parliament of Canada as the national anthem in 1967 but officially adopted only in 1980. The first performance took place on the evening of 24 June 1880 during the St-Jean-Baptiste celebrations. "O Canada" achieved immediate popularity among French-Canadians, and when English texts were created at the beginning of the 20th century it swept the entire country.

**(MUSIC)** The French words were written by Judge Adolphe-Basile Routhier, the president of the 1880 congress. However, on Routhier's own testimony it is known that Lavallée wrote the music first and Routhier then composed the text to fit the melody. English texts were supplied by various writers, either as translations or free adaptations, but eventually the text by Robert Stanley Weir (1908) became the one universally sung. The tune opens with the common formula 3-5-1 of the major triad, used by composers from Corelli's time and several times by Mozart; perhaps the closest resemblance is with the opening of Robert Schumann's *Sonata for the Young* in G major. G major was also Lavallée's key, but most later editions have the song in E flat major. **(PUBLICATIONS)** The music was published in 1880 by Arthur Lavigne of Quebec. Many later editions tamper with the original harmonization, as an integral part of Lavallée's inspiration, still remains the most appropriate. **(RECORDINGS)**

Numerous versions can be found on *The Life and Times of Calixa Lavallée*, RCI 513. "With Glowing Hearts" (a CD and video produced by the O Canada Foundation in 1992) also features several contemporary versions of *O Canada*. The National Library of Canada has compiled lists of all publications and recordings of this work **(FURTHER READING)** EMC 2, 957-959; "[http://canada.gc.ca/canadiana/anthm\\_e.html](http://canada.gc.ca/canadiana/anthm_e.html)"



Cover illustration of the Delmar Chord edition harmonized by G.A. Grant-Schaefer, 1908  
Music Division, National Library of Canada

