

In 1789, bread was a very important part of a French person's diet. Because of an economic crisis in France, however, French mothers were having a very hard time buying bread for their children.

Not only was it scarce, bread was expensive.

Fed-up with the situation, a group of women decided to express their grievance directly to the King. Louis XVI and his family - plus their entire court - were living at the Palace of Versailles, about 13 miles from Paris.

Not only did the mothers want bread, at that moment, they also wanted affordable bread in the future. They planned to demand both things from Louis XVI.

Taking advantage of the women's growing anger, and their imminent march on Versailles, French revolutionaries seized the moment. They believed if the march took place, something else - something very significant - could occur.

What was that potential event of great significance? The revolutionaries, and the group of upset women, could demand Louis XVI to move his court to Paris - where the people lived and the revolution had taken hold.

If the King remained in Versailles - more distant from the people and more removed from the revolutionaries - those leading the rebellion would have had restricted access to him. But if he came to Paris ... maybe things could be different. There, he would be much closer to the ongoing political upheaval.

The King did, in fact, return to Paris. Things did not go well for him there.

About three years after the women's march to Versailles, Rouget de Lisle composed the lyrics of a song which would become the French national anthem. It was first performed in Paris on the 30th of July, 1792.

Called "La Marseillaise," de Lisle's work is a revolutionary song. Beyond a call to arms, it is an anthem of freedom which urges French citizens to fight against tyranny from *within* its borders and invasion from *without*.

Today, when French people sing their national anthem, they usually use the first verse and the first chorus. Translated into English, the words are:

*Arise, children of the Fatherland,  
The day of glory has arrived!  
Against us tyranny's  
Bloody banner is raised, (repeat)  
Do you hear, in the countryside,  
The roar of those ferocious soldiers?  
They're coming right into your arms  
To cut the throats of your sons, your women!*

*To arms, citizens,  
Form your battalions,  
Let's march, let's march!  
Let an impure blood  
Soak our fields!*

Sometimes, when the French sing their anthem, they also use the fifth and six verses:

*Frenchmen, as magnanimous warriors,  
Bear or hold back your blows!  
Spare those sorry victims,  
Who arm against us with regret. (repeat)  
But not these bloodthirsty despots,  
These accomplices of Bouillé,  
All these tigers who, mercilessly,  
Rip their mother's breast!*

*To arms, citizens...*

*Sacred love of the Fatherland,  
Lead, support our avenging arms  
Liberty, cherished Liberty,  
Fight with thy defenders! (repeat)  
Under our flags, may victory  
Hurry to thy manly accents,  
May thy expiring enemies,  
See thy triumph and our glory!*

*To arms, citizens...*

Thanks to YouTube, we can hear the *La Marseillaise*. This clip features Mireille Mathieu, in her legendary 1989

performance in front of the Eiffel Tower.

The occasion, for Mathieu's performance, was to mark the 100th anniversary of the Tower (which originally was slated to be dismantled in twenty years).

## Credits:

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## Media Stream

### Eiffel Tower - Original Life Span of 20 Years

Clip from *True Legend of the Eiffel Tower*

**Director:**

Simon Brook

**Writers:**

Simon Brook and Pascal Lainé

**Key Cast Members:**

**Jacques Frantz** - Gustave Eiffel

**Annelise Hesme** - Claire Eiffel

**Nicolas Vaude** - Edouard Barbier

**Jean-Pierre Becker** - Jean Compagnon

**Marc Samuel** - Minister Lockroy

**Composer:**

Laurent Petitgirard

**Cinematographer:**

Vincent Jeannot

**Studio/Producer:**

Co-production France-Switzerland-Belgium; Canal+ / Le Musée d'Orsay / RTL-TVi /  
Télévision Suisse-Romande (TSR) / VAB

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