

## FRATELLI D'ITALIA (“BROTHERS OF ITALY”)

We owe the “Canto degli Italiani” (“The Song of the Italians”), better known as Mameli’s Hymn, to the city of Genoa. The Song of the Italians was written in the autumn of 1847 by the then 20-year-old student and patriot Goffredo Mameli and shortly after set to music in Turin, by another Genoese, Michele Novaro. It was written in the atmosphere of patriotic fervour that was the prelude to the war against Austria.

The spontaneity of the verses and the impetus of the melody turned it into the best-loved song of the Unification of Italy, not only during the phase of the Risorgimento but also in the following decades. It was not by chance that Giuseppe Verdi, in his Hymn of Nations of 1862, selected The Song of the Italians – and not the Royal March – to be the emblem of Italy, placing it next to God Save the Queen and La Marseillaise.

It was therefore natural for Mameli’s Hymn to be proclaimed the Italian Republic’s national anthem on the 12th of October 1946.

## THE POET

Goffredo Mameli dei Mannelli was born in Genoa on the 5th of September 1827. He was the son of Adele – or Adelaide – Zoagli, the descendant of one of the most distinguished aristocratic families of Genoa, and Giorgio Mameli, who was born in Cagliari and was the commander of a squadron in the fleet of the Kingdom of Sardinia. A precocious student and poet and a convinced liberal republican, he joined Giuseppe Mazzini’s movement in 1847, when he actively participated in the Genoese protests claiming reforms and composed The Song of the Italians. From that moment on, the poet-soldier would entirely devote his life to the Italian cause: in March 1848, he went to the insurgent Milan at the head of 300 volunteers as captain of the Bersaglieri to fight the Austrians on the Mincio River.

After the armistice of Salasco, he returned to Genoa to work with Garibaldi and, in November of 1848, he went to Rome where the Republic was proclaimed on the 9th of February 1849. Despite a fever, Mameli was always at the forefront of the defence of the city when it was besieged by the French: on the 3rd of June he suffered an injury in his left leg, which was subsequently amputated after gangrene set in.

He died from the infection on the 6th of July, at 7:30 a.m., at only 22 years of age. His remains rest at the Ossuary Mausoleum on the Janiculum Hill.

## THE MUSICIAN

Michele Novaro was born on the 23rd of October 1818 in Genoa, where he studied composition and singing. In 1847 he went to Turin with a contract for second tenor in the choir of the Regio and Carignano theatres.

A staunch liberal, he used his talent for composition to set to music dozens of patriotic songs and to organise performances to raise funds for Garibaldi's endeavours.

Of humble disposition, he drew no advantage from his most famous hymn, not even after the Unification of Italy. After returning to Genoa, between 1864 and 1865 he founded his Scuola Corale Popolare ("People's Chorus School"), to which he dedicated all his efforts.

He died in poverty on the 21st of October 1885, putting an end to a life marked by financial difficulties and health problems. At the initiative of his former students, he was erected a funerary monument in the cemetery of Staglieno, where he now rests near the grave of Giuseppe Mazzini.

## HOW THE HYMN WAS CREATED

The best-known testimony, albeit of many years later, was given by Anton Giulio Barrili, a patriot and poet and a friend and biographer of Giorgio Mameli.

The scene takes place in Turin: “There, in a mid-September evening at the home of Lorenzo Valerio, an outstanding patriot and a renowned writer, we played music and talked politics. Indeed, in order to put them in sync, we read on the piano the scores of the hymns that had mushroomed that year in every corner of Italy, from *Del nuovo anno già l'alba primiera* by Meucci in Rome, with music by Magazzari, to Bertoldi's latest proposal from Piedmont, *Coll'azzurra coccarda sul petto*, with music by Rossi.

At that point a new guest came into the living room: Ulisse Borzino, the illustrious painter that all my Genoese friends will easily remember. He had just arrived from Genoa and, turning towards Novaro, he took a slip of paper out of his pocket and said: “Here; it's from Goffredo.” Novaro unfolded the sheet of paper, read it and was moved by it. Everybody present asked him what it contained and crowded around him. “Something wonderful!” exclaimed the Maestro and started reading it out loud, raising the enthusiasm of all his audience. When I asked news of the hymn in April of '75 for a commemoration of Mameli that I was organising, he said: “I felt it; I felt deep inside me something extraordinary, which I am not able to define now, despite the 27 years that have elapsed. I remember that I cried, I felt agitated and could not sit still.”

“I sat at the harpsichord, with Goffredo's verses on the music stand, and strummed away, with my fingers killing the instrument, my eyes fixed on the hymn, creating melodious phrases, one after the other, but never thinking they could ever be adapted to those words. I got up dissatisfied with my work; I stayed at Valerio's house a while longer but with those verses still before my eyes and in my mind. I saw there was no possible

remedy, I took leave and ran home. There, without even taking off my hat, I sat at the piano.

I remembered the tune that I had strummed at Valerio's house: I immediately jotted it down on a piece of paper, the first I could find: in my agitation, I knocked over the oil lamp on the harpsichord and consequently also over the sheet of paper; it was the original of the Fratelli d'Italia anthem."

Brothers of Italy,  
Italy has woken,  
Bound Scipio's helmet  
Upon her head.  
Where is Victory?  
Let her bow down,  
For God created  
her Slave of Rome.

Let us join in a cohort,  
We are ready to die.  
We are ready to die,  
Italy has called.

Let us join in a cohort,  
We are ready to die.  
We are ready to die,  
Italy has called! Yes!

We were for centuries  
downtrodden, derided,  
because we are not one people,  
because we are divided.

Let one flag,  
one hope gather us all.  
The hour has struck  
for us to unite.

Let us unite,  
let us love one another,  
For union and love

Reveal to the people  
The ways of the Lord.  
Let us swear  
to set free  
The land of our birth:  
United, for God,  
Who can overcome us?

From the Alps to Sicily,  
Legnano is everywhere;  
Every man has the heart  
and hand of Ferruccio  
The children of Italy  
Are all called Balilla;  
Every trumpet blast  
sounds the Vespers.

Mercenary swords,  
they're feeble reeds.  
The Austrian eagle  
Has already lost its plumes.  
The blood of Italy  
and the Polish blood It drank,  
along with the Cossack,  
But it burned its heart.



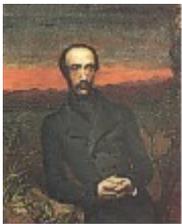
Mameli was educated in the classics and strongly recalled the Roman era. The helmet worn by Italy when getting ready for war was that of Scipio Africanus, the winner of the Battle of Zama.



The Goddess Victory offers herself to the new Italy and to Rome, to which she had been enslaved for will of the gods. The Motherland calls to arms: a cohort was in fact a tenth portion of a Roman Legion.



A common flag and hope (speme) for Italy which, in 1848, was still divided into seven States.



A republican and a follower of Mazzini, Mameli here translates the political design of the creator of the Giovine Italia and Giovine Europa insurrectionary political movements. “For God” is a Gallicism meaning “through God” or “from God”.



In this stanza, Mameli retraces seven centuries of fighting the dominion of foreign powers. First of all, the battle of Legnano of 1176, in which the Lombard League defeated Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. This was followed by the desperate defence of the Republic of Florence, besieged by the imperial army of Charles V in 1530, of which Captain Francesco Ferrucci became the emblem. On the 2nd of August, ten days before the city capitulated, Ferrucci defeated the enemy troops in Gaviniana. Wounded and captured, he was executed by Fabrizio Maramaldo, an Italian hired in the ranks of the enemy, to whom he addressed the now famous dooming words: “You are killing a dead man”.



Although not historically proven, the figure of Balilla represents the symbol of the popular revolt of Genoa against the Austro-Piedmontese coalition. After five days of fighting, on the 10th of December 1746 the city was finally liberated from the Austrian troops that had occupied and oppressed it for several months.



Every “blast” means every bell. It was the night of the 30th of March 1282, when all the bells called on the people of Palermo to rebel against the French troops of Charles of Anjou, thus becoming the Sicilian Vespers.



Austria was on the decline (“Mercenary swords, they're feeble reeds”) and Mameli strongly stresses the fact. This stanza was in fact initially censored by the government of Piedmont. Together with Russia (“the Cossack”), Austria had cruelly dismembered Poland. But the blood of the two oppressed populations had turned into poison, which lacerated the heart of the black eagle of the Habsburg dynasty.