

you know you're in washington when...

... you hear that the state song is "Louie Louie"

How did "Louie Louie," variously described as one of the dumbest songs ever written and the missing link between 1950s rock 'n' roll and 1960s hard rock, become a candidate for the state song?

Washington's official state song, Helen Davis's "Washington, My Home," was adopted in 1959, displacing the unofficial state song, "Washington Beloved." The latter's lyrics were written by historian Edmond Meany with music by Reginald de Koven, who wrote "O Promise Me" and other operettas.

Not impressed with Davis's lyrics, some residents started a semiserious movement in the 1980s to dethrone "Washington, My Home." Their pick? "Louie Louie." Excluding Paul McCartney's "Yesterday," no other pop or rock song has been recorded more.

OK, so Richard Berry's 1955 calypso-style ballad is about a lovesick sailor in a bar pining for his woman—but it does have a Washington state tie. A Tacoma band, The Wailers, added a few twists and made it a regional rock 'n' roll favorite, although their version did not hit the national charts.

The Kingsmen had better luck, turning the party song into a hit (number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart) in 1963. Their version was basically undecipherable, the first step in becoming a legend. Parents and politicians alleged that the lyrics were

obscene (rumor had it that the smutty words could be understood if you played the 45-rpm single at a slower speed). The FBI tried to prove it was obscene but gave up after two and a half years.

Eventually, fans lobbied for state-song status. A 1985 legislative resolution said that the state needed a "contemporary theme song that can be used to engender a sense of pride and community"—not to mention tourism and economic development.

The state Senate actually approved the resolution, but the House did not.

State Song:

"Washington, My Home" had to hold off a challenge from "Louie Louie."

STATE SONG

Louie, Louie oh no
~~washington my home~~
 Wherever I may roam
 This is my land, my
 native land,
 Washington my home