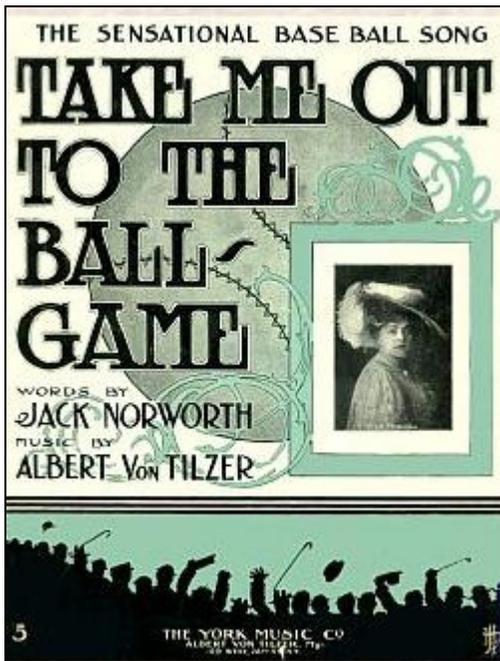




Happy 100th Anniversary to *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*!

On May 2nd, 1908, the *New York Clipper* carried a small advertisement for the sheet music to a baseball song titled "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." On that same day the song was registered with the copyright office.

The "Tin Pan Alley" team of composer Albert Von Tilzer and lyricist Jack Norworth had churned out the simple little song in roughly 15 to 30 minutes. Little did they know they had penned what would become the most popular American song written in the 20th century. Today it is the country's third most frequently sung tune, trailing only "Happy Birthday" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."



The song has been recorded in nearly every genre of music: blues, rock, jazz, classical, soul, pop, and even rap. It has been recorded by over 400 singers and musical groups. It is no surprise to learn that it was recorded by Bing Crosby, the Andrews Sisters, and Frank Sinatra, but you might not know that there are also versions by LL Cool J, Aretha Franklin, Liberace, Jimmy Buffett, Dr. John, Bob Dylan, The Goo Goo Dolls, Carly Simon, and a superb soul rendition by the Ink Spots.

The instrumental renditions range from the Boston Pops to Harpo Marx playing a tender version on the harp that is still remembered as one of the highlights of television in the 1950s.

Oh, yes, and don't forget the bunch of pigeons who were trained by behavioral scientist B.F. Skinner and his students. Skinner was a baseball fan who rooted for the Red Sox, and in 1950 he demonstrated his famous reinforcement theory of reward and punishment by teaching pigeons to play *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* on a pigeon-sized seven-key piano.

The song has also been featured in over 1200 movies and television shows, including two movies that were both titled

Take Me Out to the Ball Game. It eventually became a staple of the seventh inning stretch at baseball games, from the amateur ranks to the pinnacle of the professional leagues. Just in the major league ballparks it is sung roughly 5000 times every year!

In 1994 the sports radio station WJMP-AM in Kent, Ohio, protested the baseball strike by playing *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* 25,000 times in a row. And fans kept calling in, saying, "Keep it coming."

Most fans do not realize they are only singing the chorus of the song. The song has two verses which tell the story of a young woman who is a big baseball fan. When her boyfriend offers to take her to a show, she says that what she would really like him to do is "Take me out to the ball game."

The secret to 25 Years on the air?

The lead-in and exit music for the radio version of *A Page from Baseball's Past* is "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" played on a trombone.

When Director Ken Burns did his 1994 PBS series, *Baseball*, he had several of his interview subjects sing the chorus from memory, and it was surprising to see how prone we are to changing the lyrics of this immensely popular tune. The most frequently missed line is "Take me out with the crowd." When folks aren't actually looking at the lyrics, they often transpose this line to "Take me out to the park."

In 1953 Jack Norworth donated his original draft of the lyrics to the Baseball Hall of Fame. It is interesting to see that on that fateful day 100 years ago, Norworth had originally penned that line as "Take me out to the park" and then changed it.



The full lyrics to "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" by Jack Norworth, copyright 1908

Katie Casey was base ball mad,
Had the fever and had it bad;
Just to root for the home town crew,
Ev'ry sou Katie blew.
On a Saturday, her young beau
Called to see if she'd like to go
To see a show but Miss Kate said,
"No, I'll tell you what you can do."

"Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out with the crowd.
Buy me some peanuts and cracker jack,
I don't care if I never get back,
Let me root, root, root for the home team,
If they don't win it's a shame.
For it's one, two, three strikes, you're out,
At the old ball game."

Katie Casey saw all the games,
Knew the players by their first names;
Told the umpire he was wrong,
All along good and strong.
When the score was just two to two,
Katie Casey knew what to do,
Just to cheer up the boys she knew,
She made the gang sing this song:

"Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out with the crowd.
Buy me some peanuts and cracker jack,
I don't care if I never get back,
Let me root, root, root for the home team,
If they don't win it's a shame.
For it's one, two, three strikes, you're out,
At the old ball game."

Research Notes

⊖ The highly regarded Harpo Marx version of *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* was performed during an episode of *I Love Lucy* in 1955. Harpo first whistled his way through the tune and then played it ever so softly on the harp. It was a moment that entranced viewers across the country and became one of the best remembered episodes of that hit series.

⊖ The first film inspired by the music and titled *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* was a 1910 silent film that has not survived but was described as being a baseball comedy. Much better remembered is the 1949 hit movie *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, and Esther Williams. In this movie Kelly and Sinatra sing the first verse of the song and you may notice that the girl in the song is named Nelly Kelly rather than the original Katie Casey. Lyricist Jack Norworth re-wrote the lyrics in 1927, most likely to gain a second copyright. That 1927 copyright does not apply to the popular chorus, which is covered under the original copyright which expired in the United States in 1983.

⊖ Much of this research was assisted by the delightful book *Baseball's Greatest Hit: The Story of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game,"* by Andy Strasberg, Bob Thompson, and Tim Wiles. Published by Hal Leonard Books, it includes a CD of several versions of the song by various recording artists.