

## Russia hit the right notes

Contributed by Administrator  
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If ever there was a European Championship for national anthems, Russia would surely be a title contender. The Hymn of the Russian Federation may not be the catchiest name for a tune, but the wonderfully mournful song to the nation's "broad expanse for dreams" could challenge perennial favourites such as La Marseillaise, L'Inno di Mameli, Das Deutschlandlied or surprise package A Portuguesa. The hope for fans waving white, blue and red flags at St. Jakob-Park was that this would be the only elegy sung to Mother Russia on the night of the third UEFA EURO 2008™ quarter-final.

### Same old tune

Dutch supporters have a reputation for liking nothing better than a sing-along themselves, often borrowing from the English terrace canon. It is a less acknowledged fact that their national anthem, Het Wilhelmus, stakes a claim as being the world's oldest, with its tune dating back to the 16th century when it was a French soldiers' song. The melody, after it reached the Netherlands, was adapted to tell of William I of Orange, a key figure in the Dutch struggle for independence. The eponymous hero of Het Wilhelmus is also known as William the Silent, a quality notably lacking among the travelling army from northern Europe at these finals. The current invasion of Basel, it is estimated, has numbered at least 100,000. William at least would have approved of the colour of battle dress.

### Noise solution

The Russian supporters attending this tournament have also been happy to nod in the direction of history &ndash; before the decisive victory over Sweden in Innsbruck, they had unfurled a giant decorative banner portraying another former opponent of the Swedes, Peter the Great. There was no such pageantry on show here, possibly because not all of Russia's fans had made the trip from their base in Austria. Still, those that got to St. Jakob-Park were noisy enough. It wasn't that they were singing when they were winning either, for they had been the noisier lot throughout, though they did fairly explode when Roman Pavlyuchenko scored after 56 minutes.

### Great glory

Russia's footballers have helped to conquer Europe before, the USSR winning the first edition of this competition in 1960. After outmanoeuvring the Netherlands here &ndash; the victory should really have been emphatically theirs before Ruud van Nistelrooy's 86th-minute header &ndash; Guus Hiddink's team stand only two matches away from becoming the second side, after the Dutch in 1988, to lift the crown following an opening-day defeat. But, considering the way they went out and won the game for a second time with Andrei Arshavin laying on a goal for Dmitri Torbinski and then scoring himself, Russian football can already sing about a "mighty will and a great glory". (uefa.com)